

# The High Weald AONB

An outstandingly beautiful Medieval landscape



## Management Plan 2019–2024

A statutory plan setting out local authority policies for the management of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

# The High Weald

## AONB Management Plan

### 2019-2024

Published by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, on behalf of:

- East Sussex County Council

■ Kent County Council

■ Surrey County Council

■ West Sussex County Council

■ Ashford Borough Council

■ Crawley Borough Council

■ Hastings Borough Council

■ Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council

■ Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

■ Horsham District Council

■ Mid Sussex District Council

■ Rother District Council

■ Sevenoaks District Council

■ Tandridge District Council

■ Wealden District Council

**This edition published 2019**

Third edition published 2014 · Second edition published 2009 · First edition published 2004



High Weald Joint Advisory Committee  
Woodland Enterprise Centre  
Hastings Road, Flimwell  
East Sussex TN5 7PR  
  
Tel: 01424 723011  
Email: [director@highweald.org](mailto:director@highweald.org)  
Web: [www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)



# Contents

Foreword	2	AONB policy and legal framework	17
High Weald Joint Advisory Committee		Purpose of designation	17
Message from the Chairman	4	Responsibility for conservation and enhancement	17
Our commitment	5	Legal framework	18
Our vision	5	History of AONB designation and policy	18
The High Weald		The designation process	19
The High Weald's facts and figures	6	High Weald designation history	20
The High Weald's landscape	8	Planning and AONBs	20
A brief history of the High Weald	10	AONB 'setting'	21
About the Plan	13	The international context	21
What is an AONB?	13	What is natural beauty?	22
Who prepares the Plan and what is its status?	13	High Weald AONB Statement of Significance	23
What is the purpose of the Plan?	14	Natural Beauty	
Who is the Plan for and when should it be used?	14	Geology, landform, water systems and climate	24
Which local authority functions are covered by the AONB Management Plan?	14	Settlement	30
What is included, and not included, in the Plan?	14	Routeways	36
How was the Plan prepared?	15	Woodland	40
How to use the Plan	15	Field and heath	46
Monitoring and evaluation	16	Land-based economy and related rural life	52
Implementation	16	Other qualities	58
Documents prepared in support of this Plan	16	High Weald Charter for residents and visitors	64
		Definition of terms	66
		Glossary	67





# Foreword

*from Lord Gardiner of Kimble*

I am fortunate that England’s Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are part of my Ministerial responsibilities. Whether it be rolling hills, sweeping coastline or a tranquil village, spending time in an AONB can stir the heart and lift the spirit.

This is a pivotal moment for all AONBs. The Government has set its ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan which states clearly the importance of natural beauty as part of our green future, while AONBs retain the highest status of protection for landscape through national planning policy. Leaving the EU brings with it an opportunity to develop a better system for supporting our farmers and land managers, who play such a vital role as stewards of the landscape. And the Review of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty led by Julian Glover – the first of its kind for generations – will make recommendations to make sure our designated landscapes can flourish in the years ahead.

In my visits to AONBs around the country, I have been struck by the passion of many people – farmers, volunteers, and hard-working staff – for the beautiful places they live and work. In this spirit I am delighted to welcome publication of this Statutory Management Plan for the High Weald AONB. It is significant that this plan will be delivered in partnership by those who value the High Weald AONB. I would like to thank all those involved in preparation of this document, and wish you the best of success in bringing it to fruition.



**Lord Gardiner of Kimble**  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity



*‘The Government has set its ambition in the 25 Year Environment Plan which states clearly the importance of natural beauty as part of our green future, while AONBs retain the highest status of protection for landscape through national planning policy.’*

**The High Weald is an outstandingly beautiful landscape cherished by people and celebrated for its scenery, tranquillity and wildlife. Its ridges and valleys are clothed with an intricate mosaic of small fields interspersed with farmsteads and surrounded by hedges and abundant woods, all arranged around a network of historic routeways. One of the best surviving Medieval landscapes in North West Europe, the High Weald has remained a unique and recognisable area for at least the last 700 years. Covering 1500 km2 and close to London, this extensive area offers millions of people opportunity to experience the beauty of nature within a working countryside. It was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1983.**

***‘A landscape not yet bulldozed for speed’***  
As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning, Laurie Lee, 1969



# Message

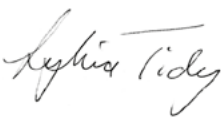
## from the Chairman

This year sees the 70th anniversary of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act which paved the way for AONB designation. The vision and ambition embodied in this Act ensured a wonderful legacy, securing the protection of outstandingly beautiful landscapes, such as the High Weald, for the nation.

The third review of the AONB Management Plan takes place in a rapidly changing context when the beauty of the High Weald is under threat from inappropriate development, decline in traditional land management and loss of biodiversity. AONBs are facing considerable challenges. Most striking is our need to cut carbon emissions by nearly 50% over the next 12 years to help ensure global warming is kept to a maximum of 1.5C. Achieving this will entail a shift to regenerative land management that protects soila carbon and a strict focus on development, where it is appropriate, that supports low carbon living and provides ultra-low carbon buildings suitable to our residents’ needs.

The Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan published in March 2018 recognises AONBs as some of our most unique, cherished and valuable natural assets, and makes a commitment to their continued conservation and enhancement. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) welcomes the Glover Review of designated landscapes and looks forward to playing a strengthened role in protecting the High Weald’s landscape character and restoring its wildlife and ecosystems. The AONB Management Plan helps guide our actions to meet this ambition.

In 2019 we celebrate the 30th birthday of the High Weald partnership. Set up in 1989 to champion the High Weald’s interests and coordinate action to conserve it. The Partnership became a JAC in 1996 and has gone from strength to strength. Our 15 local authority partners and Natural England will continue to work together alongside representatives of land owners, land managers and local communities, to coordinate policy and action to ensure the High Weald landscape is protected and enhanced for the future, offering us all the opportunity to enjoy, and be uplifted by, the beauty of nature on our doorstep.



**Councillor Sylvia Tidy**  
Chairman, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

**Members of the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee:** Action in Rural Sussex, Ashford Borough Council, Country Land and Business Association, Crawley Borough Council, East Sussex County Council, Forestry Commission, Hastings Borough Council, Horsham District Council, Kent County Council, Mid Sussex District Council, Natural England, The Ramblers, Rother District Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Surrey County Council, Tandridge District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Wealden District Council, West Sussex County Council.



*‘The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) welcomes the Glover Review of designated landscapes and looks forward to playing a strengthened role in protecting the High Weald’s landscape character and restoring its wildlife.’*

# The High Weald

## Joint Advisory Committee

### Our commitment

#### The Joint Advisory Committee partners will:

- Continue to work together towards sound and consistent planning policies across the AONB.
- Use the Plan as a ‘checklist’ against which to assess the impact of policies and other activities on AONB purpose to fulfil the requirements of CROW 2000, S85.
- Use the Plan and underpinning data to focus support for agriculture, land management and rural development on activities that conserve and enhance the AONB, including actions to protect sites of local, national and international conservation importance.
- Use the Plan to identify detrimental effects of proposed development on the AONB helping ensure development is ‘landscape-led’and contributes to conserving and enhancing natural beauty
- Use the Plan and underpinning data to assist with green infrastructure planning across the AONB and wider South East.
- Use the Plan to assess whether activities in the ‘setting’ of the High Weald affect land in the AONB.
- Use the Plan, and supporting research, to contribute to criteria for judging what might count as sustainable development within the AONB.

### Our Vision

#### The High Weald JAC’s vision for the future of the High Weald is a landscape which:

- Retains its distinctive historic landscape character and beauty, and has halted the erosion of natural beauty avoiding poor development and incremental change.
- Is maintained by sustainable land management practices, such as regenerative agriculture, wilding, small-scale woodland management and agro-forestry, and sees land managed by different people through diverse activities that are supported and nurtured where they deliver public benefits.
- Displays thriving wildlife and improving ecological quality in its highly interconnected and biodiverse landscape.
- Is embracing a low-carbon future with green technologies and non-fossil fuel transport underpinning a strong rural economy and thriving communities.
- Engages people with nature and contributes to the health and wellbeing of people within and outside the area.
- Demonstrates a consistent approach to planning across the AONB, allowing for appropriate housing and economic needs of thriving communities and the land-based sector without compromising the characteristic historic settlement pattern.
- Displays healthy natural systems including clean air and water providing benefits across the South East.
- Celebrates woodland history and nurtures a woodland economy whose timber products are highly valued.
- Facilitates active participation by people, their communities and businesses, in conserving the area and managing change.
- Provides a warm welcome and high quality experience for residents and visitors seeking inspiration and enjoyment of its landscape and rich, well understood and celebrated cultural heritage.
- Is valued and understood by people, businesses and communities landscape championed by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.





# The High Weald's facts and figures



The High Weald AONB was designated in 1983

One of 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

One of 34 AONBs in England covering 15% of the land

Land cover – 1,461km2 (4th largest AONB)

127,000 people live in the AONB (density 87 people per sq. km.)

70,000 live in towns excluded from the designation but wholly surrounded by it

Over 1 million people live within 5km of the AONB boundary

The AONB covers 4 counties, 11 districts and 11 parliamentary constituencies

100 parishes wholly or partly in the AONB

The JAC partnership has represented the interests of the High Weald since 1989

3500 historic farmsteads

17 market towns and larger villages

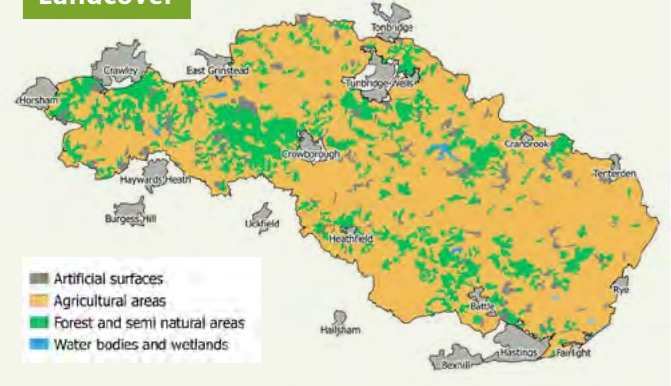
Local authority	% of AONB in local authority	% of local authority in AONB
East Sussex	60.19	50.99
Hastings	0.37	17.63
Rother	29.29	82.60
Wealden	30.53	53.36
West Sussex	13.68	9.87
Crawley	0.03	1.05
Horsham	2.46	6.77
Mid Sussex	11.19	48.96
Kent	25.41	10.21
Ashford	5.69	14.34
Sevenoaks	4.05	16.00
Tonbridge & Malling	0.07	0.39
Tunbridge Wells	15.61	68.88
Surrey	0.70	0.61
Tandridge	0.70	4.11

AONB boundaries were drawn so as to include land of outstanding scientific value to ensure:

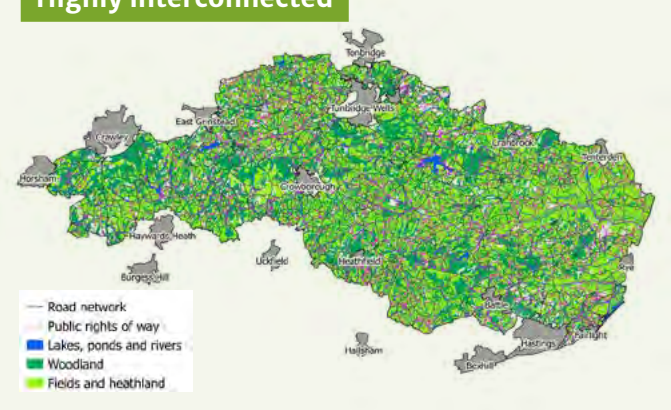
‘the preservation of large tracts of country too large for strict preservation as National Nature Reserves, but yet of great value either physiographically or geologically or as containing complex communities of plant and animal life’

The Report of the National Parks Committee 1947

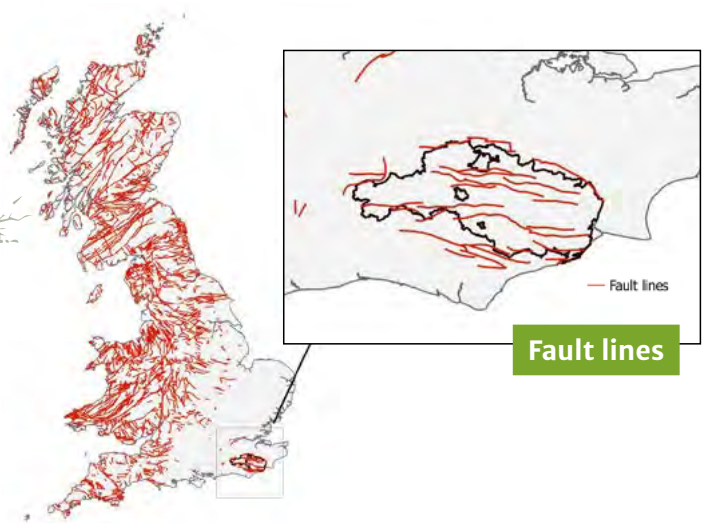
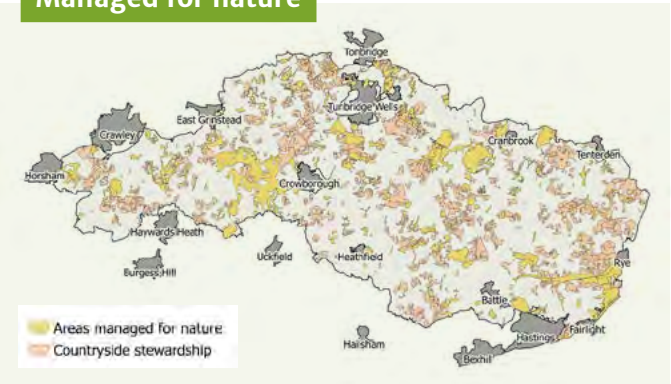
## Landcover



## Highly interconnected



## Managed for nature





# The High Weald's landscape<sup>1</sup>

**The High Weald occupies the ridged and faulted sandstone core of an area known from Saxon times as the Weald. It is an area of ancient countryside and one of the best surviving Medieval landscapes in Northern Europe.**

The mosaic of small mixed farms and woodlands is now considered to represent a quintessentially English landscape, yet for many years, until the advent of turnpikes, it was better known for the terrible state of its roads.

At first glance the High Weald appears to be a densely wooded landscape but closer examination reveals a detailed agricultural tapestry of fields, small woodlands and farmsteads. Everything in the High Weald landscape is human scale. Wildflower meadows, alive with bees and grasshoppers, are now a rare

delight, but the Medieval pattern of small fields with sinuous edges surrounded by thick wooded hedges, remain. Extensive views punctuated by church spires can be glimpsed along the ridge-top roads. Around almost every corner a harmonious group of traditional farm buildings comes into view with their distinctive steep, clay tile and hipped roofs.

The High Weald is crossed by one of the most famous routeways in English history, the one that took King Harold's army from victory at Stamford Bridge to defeat at Hasting

in 1066. Today, its rich detail is still best explored through the myriad of interconnecting paths and tracks. Here you can walk in the footsteps of our Medieval and Anglo-Saxon ancestors who used this dense network of routeways to move between the wooded Weald and settlements on its fringes where farming was easier. These tracks remain a visible legacy of the value communities placed on the resources of the forest.

Woodland still covers nearly a third of the area in an intricate network of farm woods, wooded shaws, pits and gills, and larger wooded estates. Medieval forests and deer parks were extensive, with significant remnants surviving in Ashdown Forest, Waterdown (Broadwater) Forest and St Leonard's Forest. Most of the woodland is ancient, managed in the past as coppice and swept with magnificent carpets of bluebells and wood anemones in the spring. Of the mature oaks for which the Weald was once famous, few remain. The drier sandy soils favour pine and birch within a patchwork of lowland heath.

More ancient woodland survives in the High Weald than anywhere else in the country due to the small size of Wealden holdings, the importance of crafts to supplement the income from agriculture on poor soils and the high economic value of timber for ships, buildings and to fuel the iron, glass and cloth industries. Woods were enclosed and managed as

coppice with standards, producing underwood and construction timber. Large, widely – spaced trees in hedgerows and parklands produced the crooked boughs required for shipbuilding. In the 17th and 18th centuries when hop growing expanded so did the extent of chestnut coppice for hop poles.

Indications of the area's busy industrial past are everywhere, from the large houses built by wealthy ironmasters and clothmakers, to the charcoal hearths, pits and ponds of the iron industry scattered through ancient woodlands.

The small scale and historical patterning of the landscape, intermingling woodland, wetland and open habitats, with many interconnected linear features supporting semi-natural vegetation makes for a rich and accessible landscape for wildlife. Sandstone exposed as outcrops or along the wooded gills is a nationally-rare habitat and supports a rich community of ferns, bryophytes and lichens. The High Weald meets the sea at Hastings cliffs, an area of undeveloped coastline consisting of actively eroding soft cliffs of sands and clays. The numerous gill streams of the High Weald give rise to the headwaters and upper reaches of rivers, with those to the east important in the past as trade routes for timber, iron and wool out to the coastal ports on Romney Marsh.

The High Weald is well known nationally for its wealth of historic houses and gardens including Sheffield Park and Ashburnham Place, both of whose landscaped gardens were designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown; the ruined 13th century Bayham Abbey, with grounds landscaped by Repton; the follies at Brightling created by 18th century eccentric 'Mad Jack' Fuller; Bodiam Castle, moated and dating from the 14th century; Standen, the Arts & Crafts house designed by Philip Webb; the

Jacobean house Batemans, home to Rudyard Kipling; Great Dixter, restored by Lutyens with an internationally-renowned garden created by Christopher Lloyd; and Great Maytham, home to Frances Hodgson Burnett, whose walled garden provided the inspiration for her classic children's book *The Secret Garden*. Such accents stand out against a backdrop of a rich tapestry of vernacular architecture composed of materials distinct to the High Weald and which contribute to the unique sense of place, cultural identity and local distinctiveness of both the area as a whole, and its individual settlements.

Wilder elements reminiscent of the former forest survive amid this beautiful small-scale landscape, shaped by man, inspiring many notable people. These include the architect Norman Shaw, painter William Holman Hunt and William Robinson, who pioneered the creation of the English natural garden, as well as writers Rudyard Kipling and A.A. Milne, who set his much-loved stories about Winnie the Pooh on Ashdown Forest.

The High Weald forms the central core of a geological landform of sedimentary rocks, the Wealden anticline, which underpins the South East. The unique geology of the Weald is shared with only three places in Europe – the northern part of the Isle of Wight and parts of the Boulonnais and Pays de Bray in France. The Purbeck beds, which lie along the Battle ridge,

form the oldest sediments, having been laid down in shallow lagoons at the end of the Jurassic period (142 million years ago). Iron-rich clays and sandstones followed as the landscape changed to one of flood plains and rivers. The area gradually sank below the sea and around 75 million years ago the great uplift began, followed by compression which folded and faulted the strata. Subsequent weathering has cut through the strata, exposing the layers as sandstone ridges and clay valleys. The amazing variability of soils produced has shaped the Weald's economic and therefore social history.

With rising temperatures at the beginning of the post-glacial period, and the continuing land link to Europe, arboreal species were able to expand with birch, hazel and pine being followed by oak, elm, alder, ash and lime. There is some evidence for small-scale, sporadic and temporary clearance by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. From c6000 BC, when Britain became separated from Europe, people had already begun to change the landscape,, This is evidenced by the scatter of flints used for hunting and the use of fire to make clearings to entice prey. Periodic woodland clearance continued with Bronze Age barrows and Iron Age hill forts indicating active communities in Ashdown Forest, but it was the Medieval practice of transhumance – the seasonal movement of people and animals between the settlements on the borders of the Weald and its interior – coupled with exploitation of the valuable resources of the forest, that transformed the Weald into the settled landscape we see today.

*97% of people find the High Weald's scenery, tranquillity and proximity to nature appealing*

High Weald Public Survey, 2018

1. Edited and adapted from *The Kent and Sussex Weald*, Peter Brandon, 2003.



# A brief history of the High Weald<sup>2</sup>

The High Weald lies within one of the largest tracts of woodland remaining in early Medieval England.

Termed Anderida silva by the Romans, it was referred to as Andredesleah ('leah' suggesting wood pasture)<sup>3</sup> in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and later as Andredesweald (the high forest of Andred) shortened to Weald in Saxon charters (sometimes associated with weald-bera or den-bera – a right to feed swine in the forest)<sup>4</sup>. The Weald is one of the longest lasting regional names in Britain.

Prehistory

It is possible that the system of moving livestock into seasonal grazing areas in the Weald from the surrounding downs and vales originated in the Neolithic period, or even earlier. Mesolithic and Paleolithic flint scatters are concentrated close to springs and on the drier ridgetops. There is significant evidence for communities using and clearing woodland, cultivating land and for the formation of heathland by the Bronze Age.

Iron Age ironworks are concentrated around the northern and eastern fringes of the High Weald, enabling the export of iron via tributaries of the River Thames and the Brede and Rother. The location of routeways close to Iron Age forts and camps suggest a degree of control and supervision over trade in livestock and also the export of iron and other products out of the Weald.

The Roman period (AD 43-420)

The High Weald was the premier iron producing district in Britannia during the Roman occupation, with up to 2,000 bloomeries scattered across the area and nine

industrial scale sites. Iron production, which peaked in the 2nd and first half of the 3rd centuries AD, was located within 3.5km of known Roman roads and concentrated to the east, where it was managed as an Imperial estate by the Roman Fleet (the Classis Britannica). Here it had good access to the navigable waterways of the Brede and Rother, and to major highways linking to both the London market and the wealthy villas and cornlands of the South Downs.

The Roman roads that intersect the High Weald, and which enabled the movement of military force and the extraction of iron, broadly correspond in their alignment with earlier routeways and in some cases intersect them. Unlike most routeways which avoid boggy ground, Roman roads drove across the landscape and required paved fording points where they crossed rivers and streams. Recorded Roman villas are very rare in the High Weald because the control of the Roman Fleet inhibited the development of private estates.

The Saxon period (420-1066)

Routeways provided the framework for territorial units – called 'lathes' in Kent and Surrey, and 'rapes' in Sussex – that developed after the Roman period and up to the adoption of counties and then the parish system from the 8th and 9th centuries. These routeways connected parent manors in surrounding arable landscapes to the woodland resources and rich pastures of the Weald, often at distances of 20 or 30 miles apart. These included the temporary swine pastures or 'dens' (concentrated in Kent)

where pigs and sometimes cattle and sheep were herded to feed on acorns and beech mast in the autumn.

The surveyors for Domesday Book (1086-7) used pigs as a way of calculating the value and extent of woodland. The right of tenants to graze pigs in wood pasture areas (called 'pannage') developed from the 9th century and continued into the 14th and 15th centuries. Other areas along routeways were used as seasonal pastures or stopping-off points, including 'folds' and areas which became greens and forstals within farming settlements.

The Medieval period (1066-1540)

The practice of temporary grazing from outlying manors had declined by the 11th century, probably due to the gradual break-up of the large estates by the Saxon kings through granting of lands to secular and ecclesiastical holders. Between the 9th and 12th centuries, seasonal pastures had developed into individual and clustered groups of farmsteads as more land was enclosed for growing crops and pasturing cattle. By the 14th century the High Weald's characteristic dispersed settlement pattern was well established, with the land mostly worked from individual family farms set in anciently-enclosed fields for managing crops and pasturing animals carved out of woodland and wood pasture.

The numbers of permanent farmsteads increased until the 14th

*'Unless a man understands the Weald, he cannot write about the beginnings of England...'*

Hilaire Belloc

century, requiring an increasingly dense network of routeways to link them and provide access to fields and common land. A number of new farms were created out of the woodland from the 11th century. By the late 13th century the Wealden landscape comprised a scattering of gentry properties intermingled with a mass of small peasant holdings, many of which developed – as a result of amalgamation – in the 14th and 15th centuries into larger freehold properties. Yards in farmsteads were used to manage pigs, which continued as an important part of the local farming economy, and cattle, which continued to be driven out of

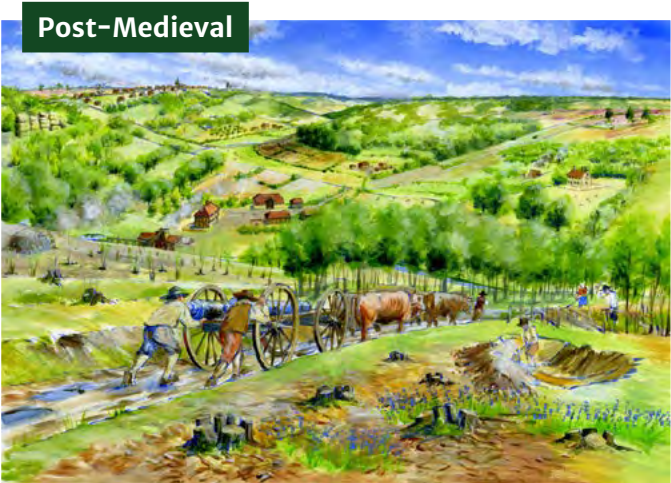
the area on the hoof for finishing. Cattle became an increasingly important export between the 14th and 18th centuries, and most locally-produced corn was produced as animal feed and for home consumption rather than as an export crop.

Villages, such as Goudhurst, Burwash (planned along a ridgeway), Wadhurst and Ticehurst, with market places for trading local products (iron, livestock, cattle hides and woodland products) developed in the 13th century along and at the meeting point of routeways. Fine Medieval houses attest to their relative wealth and their occupants often combined farming with trade.

For five hundred years the rivers of the Eastern High Weald were an important link for trade and war between the wooded interior and the sea ports of Winchelsea and Rye, which after the storms of 1285 and in the early 14th century gradually silted. Many routeways connected the Weald to navigable rivers and ports. Timber and firewood, mostly bound for France and Flanders, were the major exports from Kent and Sussex ports through to the 16th century, and the relative ease of export stimulated the woodland industry in this part of the Weald. Up to the late 15th century the River Rother was navigable to Reading Street, Smallhythe and Newenden, with Henry V's 1000-ton ship, The Jesus, built at Smallhythe in 1414. The last Royal Commission at Smallhythe was Henry VIII's great ship, the 300-ton Great Gallyon, ordered in 1546. Silt and the great storm of 1636 saw the end of the shipbuilding industry but wooden barges were still moving timber and goods from the interior of the High Weald until the end of the 19th century when the last barge, Primrose, was built.

The post-Medieval period (1540-1750)

Some colonisation of the woodland continued up to the 17th century, by which time there was a considerable growth in population linked to the growth of industries such as broadcloth manufacture and iron founding. More houses were built along routeways, enclosing areas of common land along them. In some





areas as many as a quarter of families were housed in areas enclosed from wayside common.

The Weald again became a centre of British iron making from the early 16th century, following the successful import of blast furnace technology from the Low Countries in the 1490s, concentrated in the eastern and central Weald but with significant expansion to the north and west. Interconnecting chains of leats, dams and hammer ponds were constructed to provide sufficient head of water for the forges, and wealthy ironmasters built notable mansions such as Gravetye and Great Shoemiths. The industry declined in the late 17th and 18th centuries as a result of cheaper imports, the rising price of fuel, the successful development of the use of coke, and the loss of naval contracts to provide cannon.

Most of the wool for dyeing was imported from Romney Marsh into the main cloth manufacturing areas around Cranbrook and Tenterden. Cloth was then transported overland by packhorse and more rarely wheeled transport to dealers in London. Smaller items including ironwork such as horseshoes and glass were also exported in this way. By the end of the 17th century many clothiers and ironmasters were moving into cattle rearing in response to increasing demand for beef. The hop industry developed on an industrial scale from this period, supplying maltings and breweries and stimulating the management of woodlands and shaws for fuel, and the growing of chestnut for hop poles.

The Industrial Revolution (1750–1914)

Over this period the Weald shifted from a diverse industrial and farming economy to one that was more linked to the development of capital in London and the coastal resorts, and the enjoyment of its landscape by new residents and visitors. Social commentators Arthur Young, William Cobbet and others noted the ornamental landscapes of the new gentry and admired the area’s wayside cottages with their gardens. As droving of livestock continued to decline there was further enclosure of roadside commons and greens for new houses (called ‘purpasture’ settlement), mostly driven by the large numbers of smallholders who were bereft of employment on account of the decline in the cloth and iron industries.

Most turnpikes in the High Weald were built on pre-existing highways between the 1730s and 1770s. They were of particular importance in easing the export of timber and corn, and in



supplying goods and services for the burgeoning south coast resorts such as Brighton and Hastings. Although many turnpike trusts had closed down by the 1880s they stimulated property transactions and enabled significant amounts of residential development. These were concentrated in the areas south of Tunbridge Wells and around the Brighton–London road to the west. From the 18th century, a trend in ‘pleasure farms’ saw some farmsteads converted into residential use with routeways diverted and made into private drives, which approached through new ornamental landscapes.

Farmland was reorganised with enlarged fields, existing or straightened hedgerows dotted with trees. Farmsteads were also reorganised often around courtyards to help produce more manure for fields yielding more corn for export.

The railway network intensified these developments, often increasing the demand for improved roads to connect new housing to railway stations. Additional cattle yards were built around railway stations (for example at Hawkhurst and Paddock Wood) and rail was increasingly used for exporting livestock, hops and milk. Railways, and at the end of this period motor cars and buses, also enabled tourism accompanied by guides and books such as Arthur Beckett’s The Wonderful Weald (1911).

The last hundred years, 1914 to the present

The increased appreciation of the High Weald’s historic landscape and heritage has been accompanied by the decline of traditional agriculture, cattle droving (cattle were still being driven to markets in the 1930s) and woodland management. Car ownership increased dramatically, leading to the further decoupling of settlement from land use. The building of bungalows and renovation of historic houses became common, and the areas around the Weald experienced a substantial and disproportionate increase in housing compared to the rest of England in the inter-war period.

Until the 1950s the Weald changed at a slower pace than most other regions in Britain. For 700 years prior to this, agriculture and the pattern of fields, hedges and surrounding woodland remained relatively unaltered. Since then, farming and forestry, always difficult on the poor soils, have been pushed further to the economic margins. This decline in mixed farming and woodland management is a major threat to the long term survival of the High Weald’s distinctive landscape character.



# About the Plan

What is an AONB?

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is an area of countryside designated by the Government to protect the outstanding beauty of its landscape for people now and in the future, and for the wildlife that depends on its distinctive character. A large proportion of the land in an AONB is privately owned and the actions of all land owners, land managers and land users are critical to AONB conservation.

Who prepares the AONB Management Plan and what is its status?

AONB Management Plans are statutory documents. **The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities with land in an AONB to prepare and publish an up-to-date plan which ‘formulates their policy for**

**the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it’<sup>5</sup>.** Where AONBs cross administrative boundaries, local authorities are required to act jointly to prepare the plan<sup>6</sup>. In the High Weald this requirement is delivered through the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership which includes all 15 local authorities covering the area together with community, environment and land-based sector representatives. Following a formal consultation process, the High Weald JAC recommends the joint Plan to individual local authorities who each adopt the Plan. The Plan is reviewed every five years.

5. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S89 (2).  
6. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S89 (11)(b).

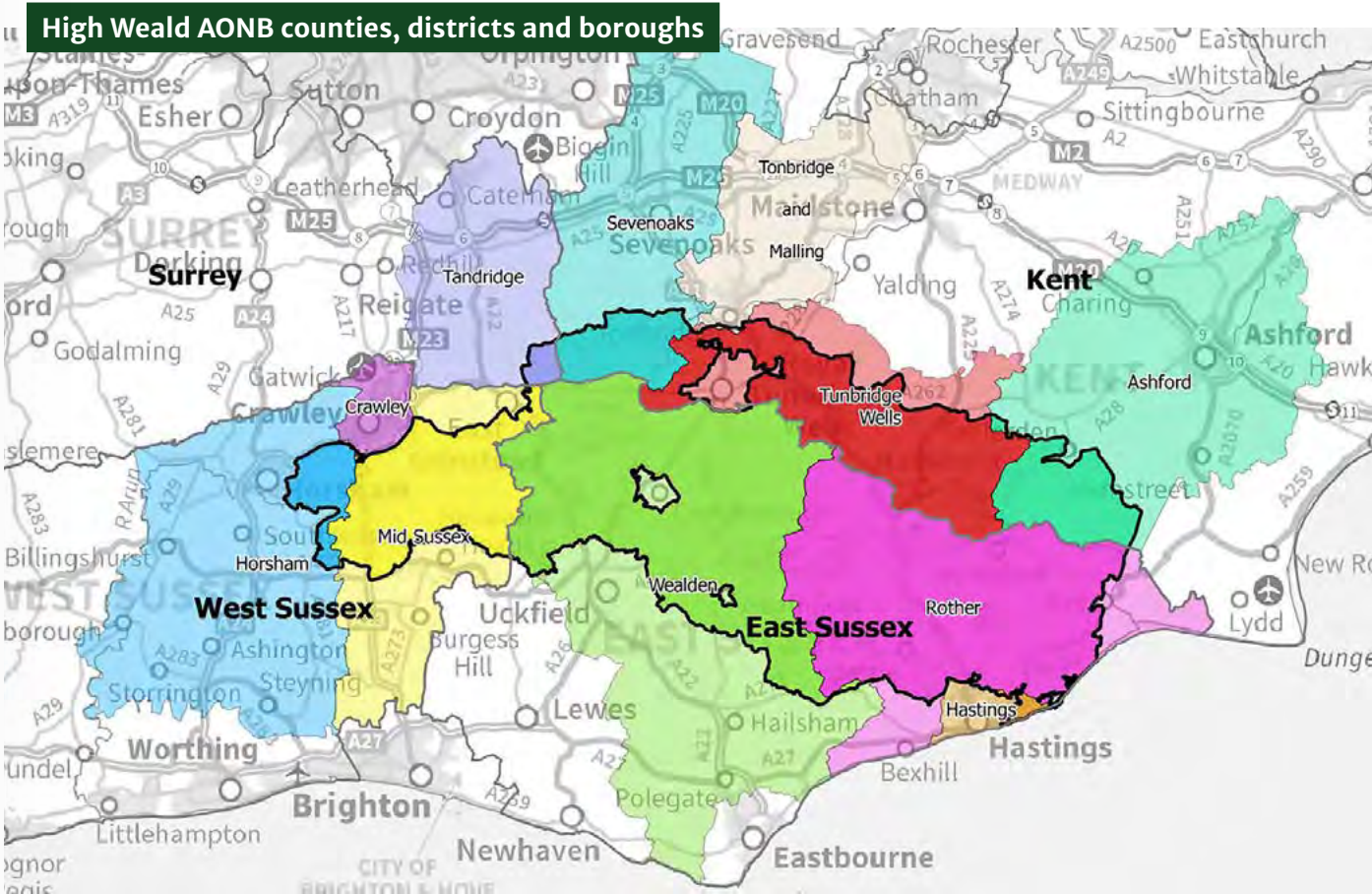


Fig 1. Fifteen local authorities have adopted the Plan as their policy for the AONB





## What is the purpose of the Plan?

AONB Management Plans are locally-owned and democratically-accountable strategies, based on evidence, for looking after these beautiful places in the interests of both people and nature. They are formulated to coordinate policy, investment and action in these nationally-important landscapes in order to achieve the legal purpose of **'conserving and enhancing natural beauty'**<sup>7</sup> for the benefit of current and future generations.

### Who is the Plan for and when should it be used?

The Plan is relevant to many organisations and individuals. As a local authority policy document it guides local authority plan-making and decision-taking, but it also has a wider role. Where people engage with local authority services, the Plan can help them tailor their actions to comply with local authority policy, and support the care and conservation of the High Weald landscape. Use of the Plan also offers a transparent means by which **Government, statutory undertakers and any public body (such as NHS England) or person holding public office** can ensure they are fulfilling their **Section 85 duty to 'have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty' of the High Weald AONB**<sup>8</sup>.

The Plan may be applied to the designated area and its ‘setting’ especially where the setting falls within the High Weald National Character Area<sup>9</sup>.

### Which local authority functions are covered by the AONB Management Plan?

Any local authority function that may have an influence upon the natural beauty of the AONB. These include:

- Planning and housing, including neighbourhood planning
- Monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas
- Building regulations and energy efficiency
- Waste, environment protection, pesticides and pollution
- Libraries and museums
- Wild animals, biodiversity, flooding and marine areas
- Rights of way and coastal access
- Food and food safety
- Public health, mental health, social care and young people
- Highways, traffic management, public transport and parking
- Education

A full list of local authority functions can be found at <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/statutory-duties-placed-on-local-government>

## What is included, and not included, in the Plan?

The Plan is designed to be concise and usable. It is tightly focused on the purpose of AONB designation and the requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. While aware of the wider realities – such as pressure for development – it does not attempt to balance the purposes of designation against non AONB concerns. Judging the merit of competing interests for land is the responsibility of Government, its agencies and planning authorities in conversation with others. The Management Plan provides such bodies with an objective, evidence-based tool articulating what matters in terms of AONB purpose and the fulfilment of their statutory duties.

The Plan includes:

- A Statement of Significance defining the natural beauty of the High Weald.

## High Weald AONB parishes



Fig 2. The High Weald AONB covers 100 parishes, each of whom have a duty of regard under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 towards its conservation and enhancement.

- Character statements, including a list of key characteristics, describing the components of natural beauty that policy and actions should aim to conserve and enhance.
- Data and information about the High Weald's natural and cultural assets.
- A set of management policies ('Objectives') for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB together with a monitoring framework for judging success.
- Proposed Actions which indicate the ambitions of partners for themselves, and for others, and which guide resources and effort to where they are most needed.
- References to evidence and supporting information.

Research reports, data sets and maps for each component of natural beauty and for selected aspects of the area's natural and cultural capital, are held by the High Weald JAC and available to support Plan delivery.

## How was the Plan prepared?

This Plan is the fourth edition of the AONB Management Plan first published in 2004. Local authorities are required to review the AONB Management Plan every five years, make any amendments they consider appropriate, and publish a report on the review<sup>10</sup>. The review follows national guidance<sup>11</sup>.

It is a formal process requiring preparation of a Strategic Environmental Assessment and other appropriate assessments to comply with English and European Union law. It reflects consideration of current and forthcoming policy changes, new data and analysis, and draws on local opinion gathered through participative engagement events and public consultation.

A full list of documents prepared in support of this Plan can be found on page 16.

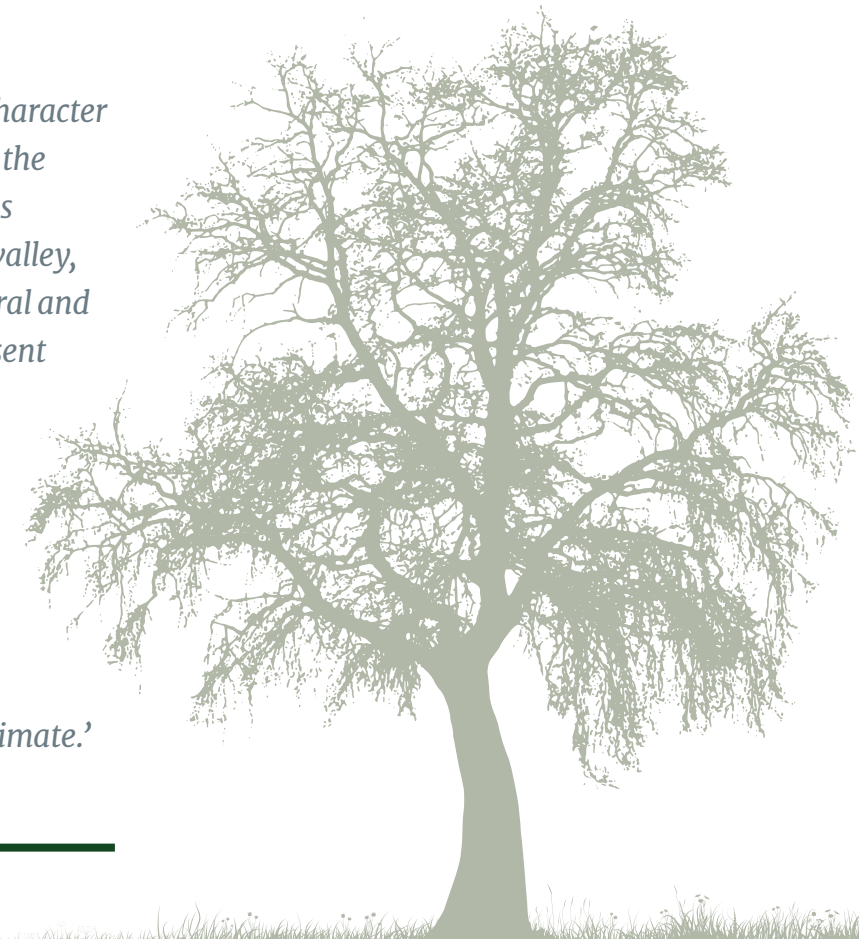
## How to use the Plan

The Plan can be used to guide environmental land management and assess the impact of development or other changes on the AONB. Where the ambition is to achieve environmental net gain, or assess potential harm, the Plan provides a framework for identifying actions that may enhance or damage the AONB's natural and cultural assets. Key characteristics for each component of natural beauty identify what is special about the High Weald's landscape and beauty that should be afforded 'great weight' in planning decisions. Data held by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) for many of these characteristics indicates their geographical extent and can assist decision-making. The Plan, and the objectives for each component in particular, acts as a checklist or set of criteria against which policy and actions can be assessed for compliance with Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000.

7. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S82 (1).
8. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S85 (1) and (2).
9. NCA Profile: 122 High Weald (2013), Natural England (NE508).
10. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, S 89 (9) and (10).
11. Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans, Countryside Agency CA221 2006 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140605121642/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40023>, & Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A Guide, Countryside Agency, CA 23 2001 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140605121641/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40024>

An AONB is ‘[Countryside of] distinctive character whose nature and value depend partly on the physical structure of the rocks of which it is composed and the sculpturing of hill and valley, partly on local climate, partly on the natural and semi-natural vegetation that may be present and partly on the crops that are grown and the agricultural regimes. All these elements blend into a whole which possess both singular beauty and high scientific interest, and the defacement or disappearance of the distinctive characters of such an [area] involves an irreparable loss which it is hard to overestimate.’

**Wild Life Conservation Special Committee  
describing proposed AONBs, 1947**





Proposed Actions for each Plan objective are ordered in two categories – ‘Public bodies’ and ‘Others’. Public bodies include all bodies subject to the statutory duty ‘to have regard to’ conservation and enhancement of the AONB – county, borough, district, parish and town councils; government departments and their arm’s length bodies, such as NHS England; statutory undertakers; highway authorities, and statutory committees. ‘Others’ include any other organisation or individual whose actions impact on the High Weald, and who can help conserve and enhance it.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring of Plan progress and of the condition of the AONB will be carried out by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee. Headline indicators will not be used due to the absence of relevant, consistent and repeatable AONB-wide data; rather

condition and threat level will be assessed using available data, expert knowledge and informed judgement. Data sources will include data gathered for each ‘Indicator of Success’ together with Natural England environmental monitoring information and any other relevant data sets.

*The Plan sets out the key characteristics of this nationally-important landscape and the ‘public goods’ it provides in order to help new environmental land management schemes achieve the ambitions of the Governments 25 year environment plan.*

Implementation

Where the Plan is used to guide policy or action on the ground the following principles should be applied:

**Landscape-scale targeting** – using the best available evidence to identify urgent challenges and achieve multiple objectives; with local knowledge used to match these areas with willing partners on the ground.

**Landscape-scale collaboration** – working with a range of partners (public, private and community), connected through geography or interest, to support strong joint initiatives (such as Farm Clusters or community land trusts).

**Tailored to local circumstances** – cognisant of local character and recognising the different aspirations, motivations, knowledge and capacity of land managers, businesses and communities.

**Trusted advisors** – recognising the value of technical experts and of experienced practitioners; bringing together specialists across landscape disciplines (such as species and habitat specialists, landscape archaeologists, rural economists) to develop integrated solutions.

**Long term commitment** – investing in partnerships, projects and activities that deliver lasting benefits.

**Knowledge transfer** – valuing long-held practical knowledge and experience of the areas’ rural heritage and seeking opportunities to share this with others.

**Payment for public benefit** – recognising the wide range of health and wellbeing benefits provided by accessible countryside, but also the importance of a biodiverse and well-functioning ecosystem, and the contribution made by local healthy food production and forestry.

**Natural systems** – using natural processes where possible to restore naturally functioning habitat mosaics within which all characteristic wildlife can thrive.

**Empowering people** – engaging people with nature; building skills and capacity, supporting volunteering and providing support to enable everyone to contribute positively to conserving the High Weald.

**Measureable biodiversity net gain** – positive action to improve diversity and biomass of characteristic AONB species supported by base line evidence and monitoring.

Documents prepared in support of this Plan

All documents prepared in support of this Plan can be found at [www.highweald.org/public-consultation-2018](http://www.highweald.org/public-consultation-2018)

- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Engagement and Consultation Report, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Strategic Environmental Assessment, Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Habitats Regulations Assessment, Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Equality Impact Assessment Screening Report, Joint Advisory Committee
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Health Impact Assessment Screening Report, Joint Advisory Committee
- Monitoring the Condition of the AONB and the Performance of the AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, August 2017
- AONB Management Plan Review 2019: Context and Issues, High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, March 2017.

# AONB Policy and Legal Framework

There are 34 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England, a further four AONBs wholly in Wales and eight in Northern Ireland. The 46 AONBs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland cover approximately 18 per cent of the land surface. Together with National Parks, AONBs represent our finest landscapes; unique and irreplaceable national assets, each with such distinctive character, biodiversity and natural beauty that they are recognised internationally as part of the global family of protected areas to be managed in the interest of everyone.

The distinctive character and natural beauty of AONBs make them some of the most special and loved places in the UK. AONBs are living, working landscapes that contribute some £16bn every year to the national economy. England’s AONBs are home to a million people and more than two thirds of England’s population live within half an hour’s drive of an AONB. Around 150 million visits to English AONBs take place every year, resulting in spending of more than £2bn.<sup>12</sup>

Purpose of designation

The primary purpose of AONB designation is to **conserve and enhance natural beauty** but the architects of the 1949 Act recognised other underlying principles which were important aspects of the designations’ success. These included the need to maintain a ‘thriving community life’ with particular emphasis on farming and forestry, and the need to promote understanding and enjoyment of the area’s special qualities.

These subsidiary purposes – in effect, qualifications of the primary purpose – are those defined in the Countryside Commission statement 1991<sup>13</sup>, restated in 2006<sup>14</sup> (the basis for the wording of the subsidiary purposes can be found in the Countryside Act 1968, section 37):

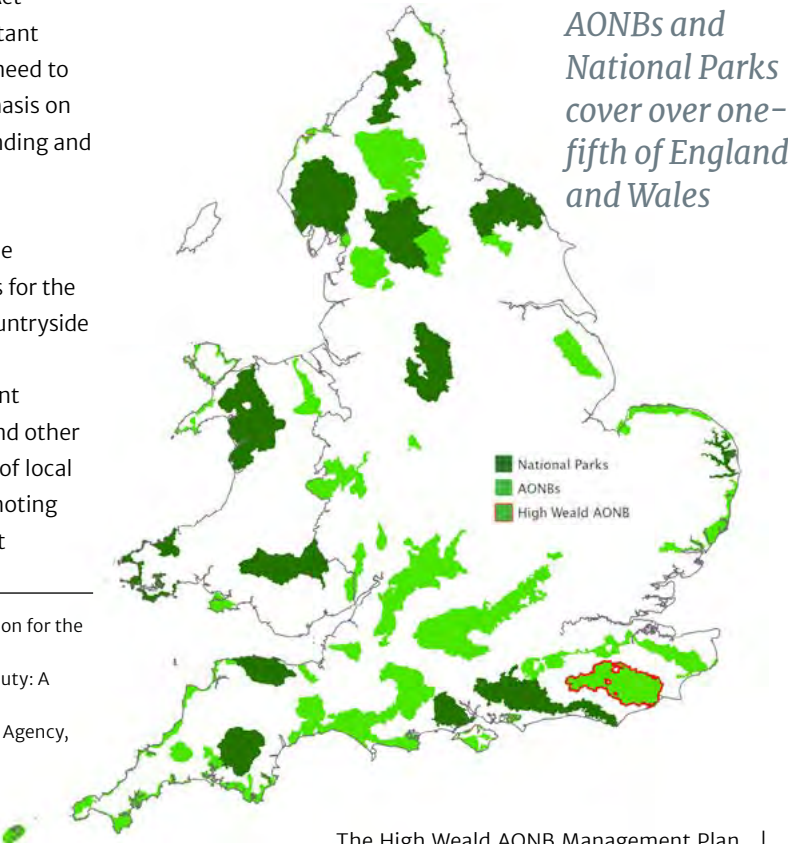
- In pursuing the primary purpose of designation, account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry and other rural industries, and of the economic and social needs of local communities. Particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development

that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment.  
■ Recreation is not an objective of designation, but the demand for recreation should be met so far as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

Responsibility for conservation and enhancement of AONBs

The formal legal responsibility for both development control and for management of AONBs (including the duty to prepare an AONB Management Plan) lies with the local authorities in whose area(s) the AONB exists, except in two instances (the Chilterns and the Cotswolds AONB) where this is the responsibility of a statutory Conservation Board.

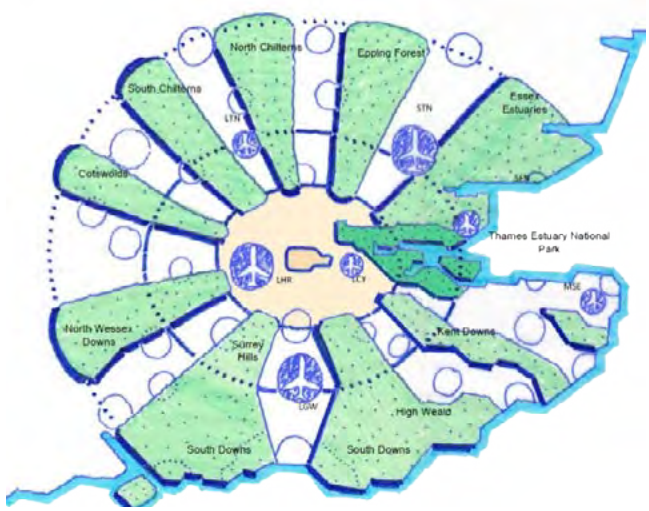
In addition, local authorities and all public bodies have a statutory duty under CROW Act 2000, Section 85, to ‘...have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty...’. To ‘conserve and enhance’ is a single duty, therefore exercising the duty requires that both elements be addressed. This duty places an obligation on a wide range of organisations



12. NAAONB (2018). Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A designation for the 21st Century. [www.landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk)  
13. Countryside Commission (1991). Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A Policy Statement (CCP 356).  
14. Guidance for the review of AONB Management Plans (Countryside Agency, CA 221, 2006, p.6).







©Farrells ystudio Ltd.

A schematic envisaging the future of London as a green global region intimately interconnected to AONBs, National Parks, and other green areas

The National Parks Commission set up by the 1949 Act warmed to the designation of AONBs, observing that they were important because of their proximity to populated areas in the lowlands.

not just to consider any detrimental impacts on AONBs of their policies and activities (both outside as well as within the boundary), but positively to consider how they might enhance the AONBs' natural beauty. Ministers of the Crown, statutory undertakers, Government agencies and any public body or person

Legal framework

- AONBs exist within a legal framework which has been progressively strengthened since the first AONBs came into existence after the Second World War.
- The **1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act** made provision for the designation of AONBs and National Parks. It provided AONBs with protection, under planning law, against inappropriate development and gave local authorities permissive powers to take action for **'preserving and enhancing natural beauty'**.
- The **Countryside Act 1968** (Section 37) placed a responsibility on local authorities, statutory conservation bodies, and civil servants, in exercising their functions under the 1949 Act (as amended by subsequent legislation) to **'have due regard to the needs of agriculture and forestry and to the economic and social interests of rural areas.'** Within AONBs this means a responsibility to acknowledge and, where appropriate, to promote farming, forestry and the rural economic and social context wherever this can be done without compromising the primary purpose of conserving natural beauty.
- The **Environment Act 1995** confirmed replacement of 'preserve and enhance' with 'conserve and enhance' in relation to the purpose of National Parks and duties of public bodies towards them.

- holding public office, including Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) through their accountable body (local authority) are subject to the Section 85 duty.
- The duty requires public bodies to have regard for AONBs at all stages of their decision making and Defra expects that they should be able to 'demonstrate that they have fulfilled' the duty and 'clearly show' how they have considered the AONB purpose in their decision making<sup>15</sup>.
- Preparation of AONB Management Plans is mostly delegated by the local authority to a representative committee on which a variety of AONB 'stakeholders' are represented. Where an AONB overlaps several different local authority areas this is usually termed a 'Joint Advisory Committee' or JAC. The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee was formally established in 1996 with its predecessor, the High Weald Forum, operating since 1989.
- At a national level, a collective voice for the UK's 46 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is provided by the National Association for AONBs (NAAONB)<sup>16</sup>. First formed in 1998, the NAAONB is a charity whose objectives are to promote the conservation and enhancement of AONBs; advance understanding and appreciation by the public, and promote effective partnerships for their management.

History of AONB designation and policy

AONBs emerged from the mood of civic renewal which characterised the decades following the end of the Second World War. The 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act was one of many – including health, education, agriculture and development planning – which established the basis for a 'new Britain'.

- The **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000** (CROW) subsumed and strengthened the AONB provisions of the 1949 Act. It brought the primary purpose in line with that of National Parks, clarified the procedure for their designation, and created a firm legislative basis for their protection and management. In particular:
  - Section 82** reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
  - Section 83** establishes the procedure for designating or revising the boundaries of an AONB, including Natural England's duty to consult with local authorities and to facilitate public engagement.
  - Section 84** confirms the powers of a local authorities to take 'all such action as appears to them expedient' to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of an AONB, and sets consultation and advice on development planning and on public access on the same basis as National Parks in the 1949 Act.
  - Section 85** places a statutory duty on all relevant authorities **'...in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect land [in an AONB] to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty...'** 'Relevant authorities' include all public

*'The Government is engaged on a Health Campaign. ...But it is no less essential, for any national health scheme, to preserve for the national walking grounds and regions where young and old can enjoy the sight of unspoilt nature. And it is not a question of physical exercise only, it is a question of spiritual exercise and enjoyment'*

The Standing Committee on National Parks, 1938

- The need to designate special areas of the countryside against inappropriate development, protect wildlife, celebrate and conserve their distinctive features, encourage sustainable agriculture and foster local economic well-being was recognised well before the Dower (1945) and Hobhouse (1947) reports which led to the establishment of AONBs and National Parks.
- Since the 1949 Act there has been continuous development in the policy and legislative context of AONBs, shaped by a number of key policy documents including:
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – A Policy Statement (Countryside Commission & Countryside Council for Wales, CCP356, 1991)
  - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – A Guide for Members of Joint Advisory Committees (Countryside Commission & Countryside Council for Wales, CCP461, 1994)
  - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Providing for the future (Countryside Commission, CCWP 08, 1998)
  - Protecting our finest countryside: Advice to Government (Countryside Commission, CCP352, 1998)

- bodies (county, borough, district, parish and community councils, joint planning boards and other statutory committees); statutory undertakers (such as energy and water utilities, licensed telecommunications companies, nationalised companies such as Network Rail and other bodies established under statute responsible for railways, roads and canals); government ministers and civil servants. Activities and developments outside the boundaries of AONBs that have an impact within the designated area are also covered by the 'duty of regard'.
- Sections 86 to 88** allow for the establishment in an AONB of a Conservation Board to which the AONB functions of the local authority (including development planning) can be transferred. Conservation boards have the additional but secondary function of seeking to increase public understanding and enjoyment of the AONB's special qualities. They also have an obligation to **'seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities'** in co-operation with local authorities and other public bodies.
  - Sections 89 and 90** create a statutory duty on all AONB partnerships (local authorities and Conservation Boards) to prepare a management plan **'which formulates their policy for the management of their area of outstanding natural**

- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans: A Guide (Countryside Agency, CA23, 2001)
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. A Guide for AONB partnership members (Countryside Agency, CA24, 2001)
- Guidance for the Review of AONB Management Plans (Countryside Agency, CA221, 2006)
- Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England (Natural England, 2011)

Seventy years after the 1949 Act and in a rapidly changing modern world, the production and implementation of revised AONB Management Plans help ensure that AONB partnerships are leaders in delivering the intentions of the 1949 Act, alongside the aspirations of the Government's 25 year Environment Plan<sup>17</sup>.

The designation process<sup>18</sup>

Natural England can make orders to designate AONBs or vary the boundaries of existing ones within England. AONBs are designated in law<sup>19</sup> following a prescribed process which includes an appraisal of landscape quality, in particular the technical criteria of sufficient natural beauty, and a wide consultation with

15. Defra (2005), Duties on Relevant Authorities to have regard to the purposes of National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads. London: Defra publications. Available from: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130402204840/http://archive.defra.gov.uk/rural/documents/protected/npaonb-duties-guide.pdf>

16. [www.landscapesforlife.org.uk](http://www.landscapesforlife.org.uk)

17. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. (2018). A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment. London: HM Government.

18. Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England. Natural England 2011 pp. 11–14.

- beauty and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it'** and thereafter to review adopted and published Plans at intervals of not more than five years. Where an AONB involves more than one local authority they are required to do this **'acting jointly'**.
- Section 92** makes clear that the conservation of natural beauty includes the conservation of 'flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features.'
- The **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006** (NERC):
    - Section 99** formally clarifies in law that the fact that an area consists of or includes land used for agriculture or woodlands, or as a park, or **'any other area whose flora, fauna or physiographical features are partly the product of human intervention in the landscape'** does not prevent it from being treated, for legal purposes, **'as being an area of natural beauty (or of outstanding natural beauty).'**
    - Schedule 7** asserts that an AONB joint committee of two or more local authorities, or a conservation board, can constitute a 'designated body' for the performance of functions allocated to Defra.





local authorities, landowners, residents and businesses.

It is the AONB as a whole that must satisfy the technical criteria of natural beauty. The weight and importance of factors indicating natural beauty may vary across the designation. The presence of incongruous features or degraded landscapes does not, in itself, detract from the value of the area as an AONB. The emphasis in these cases is on the second part of the designation purpose, that of enhancement of natural beauty. Government has confirmed that the landscape quality of AONBs and National Parks are equivalent<sup>20</sup>.

High Weald designation history<sup>21</sup>

The report of the first National Park Committee, set up in 1929, mentioned the wooded hill country of the High Weald, essentially

Planning and AONBs

Responsibility for planning in AONBs lies with the relevant local authority. The AONB Management Plan does not form part of the statutory development plan but local planning authorities and neighbourhood planning bodies should take the AONB Management Plan into account when preparing local and neighbourhood plans<sup>22</sup>. AONB Management Plans may also be material considerations for making decisions on planning applications within AONBs and their setting.

The planning system provides Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, alongside National Parks, with high levels of protection from development. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Paragraph 172, requires that:

- ‘Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Planning permission should be refused for major development<sup>55</sup> other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest (reflecting the long-established ‘Silkin test’ for development in National Parks and AONBs<sup>23</sup>). Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:
  - a. the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
  - b. the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
  - c. any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.’

**Footnote 55 says:**  
*‘For the purposes of paragraphs 172 and 173, whether a proposal is ‘major development’ is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined’.*

Ashdown Forest, as an area requiring measures to protect its bird interest. A subsequent report in 1945, the Dower Report, included the ‘Forest Ridges (Horsham to Battle)’ in its list of ‘Other Amenity Areas not suggested as National Parks’. Dower had recognised that some areas might not be suitable for National Park status because of their size or lack of ‘wildness’ but they nonetheless required safeguarding for their ‘characteristic landscape beauty’. A follow-up report, the Hobhouse Report, in 1947 included the Forest Ridges in a list of 52 Conservation Areas (largely based on Dower’s ‘Other Amenity Areas...’) which, it proposed, should be designated for their high landscape quality, scientific interest and recreational value.

The first AONB to be designated was the Gower Peninsular

**NPPF paragraph 11 states that:**  
*‘Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.’*

- For plan-making this means that:**
- a. Plans should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change;
  - b. Strategic policies should, as a minimum, provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses, as well as any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas<sup>5</sup>, unless:
    - i. The application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for restricting the overall scale, type or distribution of development in the plan area<sup>6</sup>; or
    - ii. Any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

- For decision-taking this means:**
- a. Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
  - b. Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date<sup>7</sup>, granting permission unless:
    - i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed<sup>6</sup>; or
    - ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

**Footnote 6 says:**  
*‘The policies referred to are those in this Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 176) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 63); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change’.*

*In 1947, the Wild Life Conservation Special Committee recognised that AONBs were both ‘ancient monuments and living museums’*

in 1956. It wasn’t until 1969, following coordinated landscape surveys by county and district councils, that the wider High Weald was put forward to the Countryside Commission for consideration as an AONB. Detailed work on the boundaries was then carried out and designation of the High Weald was confirmed in 1983.

AONB ‘setting’

The term ‘setting’ is used to refer to areas outside the AONB where development and other activities may affect land within an AONB. Its extent will vary depending upon the issues considered but some can be mapped, for example, the impact of development on views into and out of the AONB. Section 85 of the CROW Act 2000 requires public bodies to consider whether any activities outside the AONB may affect land in an AONB, and Planning Practice Guidance (Natural Environment: 003) emphasises that this duty is relevant in considering development proposals that are situated outside the AONB boundary. Not all activities will be detrimental; conservation practices and economic ties outside the AONB can support AONB purpose.

The international context

English AONBs are part of the international family of protected areas. As cultural landscapes, produced through the interaction of humans with nature over time, they have a special significance (together with UK National Parks) as being recognised by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as **‘Category V – Protected Landscapes’**. These offer a unique contribution to the conservation of biological diversity, particularly where conservation objectives need to be met over a large area with a range of ownership patterns and governance. They can act as models of sustainability, promoting traditional systems of management that support particular species.

**Category V protected landscapes are defined by IUCN as:**  
*‘A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value: and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.’*

IUCN emphasises their importance as cultural landscapes – as distinct from Category I (Strict Nature Reserves and Wilderness Areas) and Category II National Parks (which for IUCN are large natural or near-natural areas, unlike UK national parks). Until

recently, the AONB designation (together with that of UK national parks) was regarded as an anomaly in the international protected area system which prioritised ‘naturalness’ as a criterion of value. In the last quarter-century, however, they have come to be recognised as leaders in the move towards area-based sustainable development.

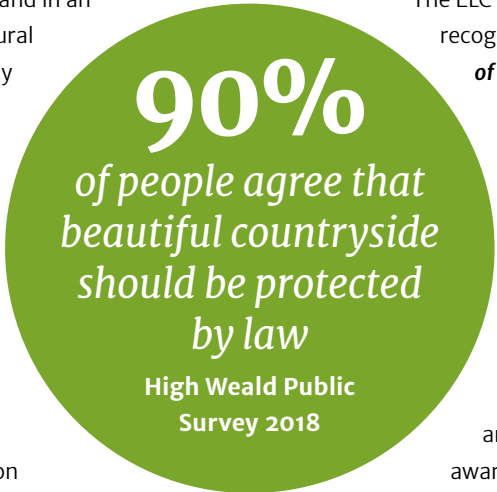
The new multidisciplinary, multifunctional concept of landscape is encapsulated in the European Landscape Convention (ELC), adopted by the Council of Europe in 2000 and ratified by the UK government in 2006 (it is not an EU directive and will remain unaffected by Brexit).

**The ELC promotes a definition of landscape which usefully underpins the rationale for AONBs:**  
*‘An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.’*

This is a rich concept that encompasses, but goes beyond, sectoral (geomorphological, ecological, archaeological, historical or aesthetic) approaches. ELC makes it clear that people are at the heart of all landscapes (the commonplace and ‘degraded’ as well as the eminent), each of which has its own distinctive character and meaning to those who inhabit or visit it.

The ELC places obligations on signatory states to recognise landscape **‘as an essential component of people’s surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity’**. Obligations include a requirement to identify the diversity and range of landscapes, implement landscape policies aimed at landscape protection, and to engage with local communities, private bodies and public authorities in their planning and management. This includes raising awareness and understanding of the character, value and functions of landscape and the way these are changing. AONBs and their managing organisations are a significant contributor to delivering on the UK’s obligations under ELC.

The AONB Management Plan in its characterisation of the landscape at an AONB scale is supported by a wealth of local landscape character assessments carried out by county, district and parish councils that provide more fine grained information about the local landscape. In addition, Natural England’s High Weald National Character Area profile provides a description of the area’s environmental character.





# What is 'natural beauty'?

# High Weald AONB Statement of Significance

## AONBs are designated for the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

The term 'natural beauty' first gained currency in a legislative context in the 1907 Act which gave legal status to the National Trust ('for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty'). It has been the basis for the designation of both AONBs and National Parks since the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, but has never been exhaustively defined in legislation<sup>24</sup>.

Over the years, qualification and amendment to the legislation has made it clear that natural beauty includes considerations such as wildlife, geological features and cultural heritage but is not restricted by them<sup>25</sup>. Government guidance relating to AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition: "'Natural Beauty' is not just the look of the landscape, but includes landform and geology, plants and animals, landscape features and the rich history of human settlement over the centuries"<sup>26</sup>. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 clarified that land used for agriculture, woodlands, parkland or with physiographical features partly the product of human intervention in the landscape, is not prevented from being treated as an area of 'natural beauty'.

In the 1949 Act 'natural beauty' replaced other phrases such as 'landscape beauty' and 'characteristic landscape beauty'<sup>27</sup>. These provide a clue to the importance of landscape character and beauty as an aesthetic experience bringing people a sense of pleasure, wellbeing and connectedness with nature. Character is interpreted in different ways with the Landscape Institute

focusing on the pattern of landscape elements<sup>28</sup>, landscape archaeologists seeing the human process of a landscape 'coming into being' and ecologists also considering the quality of the natural processes and ecological systems which underpin patterns of vegetation. Natural beauty encompasses all of these views.

Our perceptions of the landscape and the value we place on its qualities rely on our senses and emotions, and are shaped by many factors including taste, background, culture and understanding. These values may change over time even if the intrinsic character of the landscape does not.

For AONBs it is not enough just to possess natural beauty; their natural beauty should have the potential to be 'outstanding' both in terms of the quality of the components of character (including their biodiversity) and the human aesthetic experience of the landscape.

For the purposes of this Plan, natural beauty is defined by the Statement of Significance.

24. Guidance for assessing landscapes for designation as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England, Natural England 2011.  
25. A draft statement on natural beauty, The University of Sheffield, January 2006.  
26. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty: A guide for AONB Partnership members, Countryside Commission, CA24, November 2001, p.6.  
27. Holdaway, E. (2007). Origins and Intentions of the 1949 Act Natural Beauty. Report to Countryside Council for Wales.  
28. Landscape Institute and IEEM (2013). Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

**John Dower, one of the main architects of the 1949 Act recognised the overlap between natural and man-made elements in the landscape.**

*'Most natural features have some man-made or man-controlled tincture, and man-made features derive an integral part of their beauty and interest from their natural surroundings.'*

Report on National Parks, 1945

## The High Weald is one of the best preserved Medieval landscapes in North West Europe.

Despite its large size (1,500km sq.) and proximity to London, its landscape has remained relatively unchanged since the 14th century, surviving major historical events and social and technological changes. Its outstanding beauty stems from its essentially rural and human scale character, with a high proportion of natural surfaces and the story of its past visible throughout.

The extensive survival of woodland and traditional mixed farming supports an exceptionally well-connected green and blue infrastructure with a high proportion of semi-natural habitat in a structurally diverse, permeable and complex mosaic supporting a rich diversity of wildlife.

### The natural beauty of the High Weald comprises

- **Five defining components of character** that have made the High Weald a recognisably distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years.
  - 1. Geology, landform and water systems** – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with numerous gill streams.
  - 2. Settlement** – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads and late Medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
  - 3. Routeways** – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).
  - 4. Woodland** – abundance of ancient woodland, highly interconnected and in smallholdings.
  - 5. Field and Heath** – small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths, and inned river valleys.
- **Land-based economy and related rural life** bound up with, and underpinning, the observable character of the landscape with roots extending deep into history. An increasingly

broad-based economy but with a significant land-based sector and related community life focused on mixed farming (particularly family farms and smallholdings), woodland management and rural crafts.

- **Other qualities** and features that are connected to the interaction between the landscape and people and which enrich character components. Such qualities and features enhance health and wellbeing, and foster enjoyment and appreciation of the beauty of nature. These include locally distinctive features which enrich the character components such as historic parks and gardens, orchards, hop gardens, veteran trees, along with their rich and varied biodiversity, and a wide range of appealing and locally distinctive historic buildings including oast houses, farm buildings, Wealden Hall houses and their associated features such as clay-tile catslide roofs. People value the wonderful views and scenic beauty of the High Weald with its relative tranquillity. They appreciate the area's ancientness and sense of history, its intrinsically dark landscape with the opportunity to see our own galaxy – the Milky Way – and the ability to get close to nature through the myriad public rights of way.



## Natural Beauty

# Geology, landform, water systems and climate

The High Weald AONB is characterised by a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone. The ridges tend east-west, and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to, and influence, a local variant of the British sub oceanic climate.



## Key Characteristics

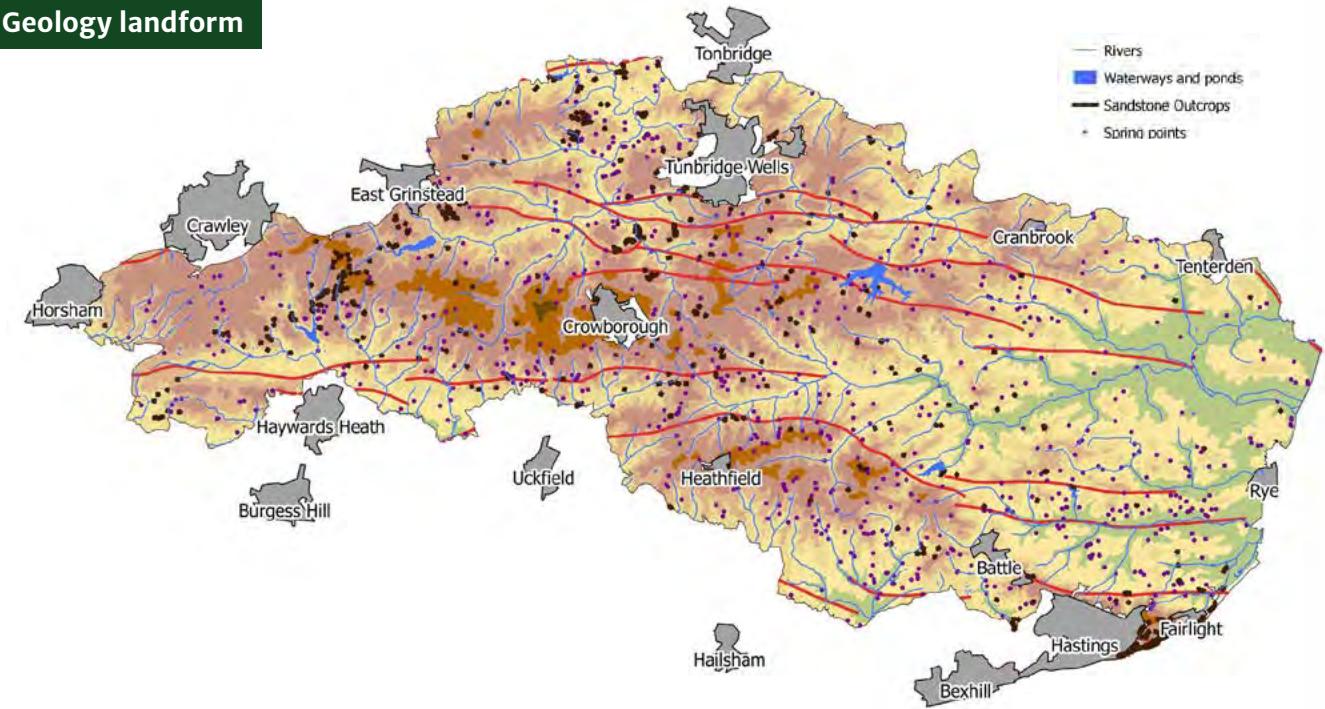
- ✓ **Impressive coastal cliffs** of interbedded sandstones and clays (Hastings Cliffs to Pett Beach SSSI and Hastings Cliffs Special Area of Conservation); natural, dynamic and evolving, and rich in Lower Cretaceous fossils.
- ✓ **A principal ridge** (Forest Ridge) running east-west from Horsham to Cranbrook with an attached ridge (Battle Ridge) extending to the sea at Fairlight.
- ✓ **A pattern of faults and folds** that distinguishes the Weald from the rest of the South and East of England, with a high concentration of springs associated with fault lines.
- ✓ **Numerous small streams** descending the main ridges in narrow steep-sided valleys (gills), historically often dammed to power industry with many 'pond bays' and 'hammer ponds' surviving.
- ✓ **Distinctive outcrops of sandstone** in the form of crags (popular with climbers) and inland sea cliffs, gill stream bed and banks, old quarries, and along road edges associated with the survival of rare cryptogam communities (ferns, lichens, liverworts and mosses).
- ✓ **A high density of pits, quarries and ponds** resulting from a long history of stone quarrying, surface mining and marl extraction.
- ✓ **Locally-distinctive geological materials** – sandstone, clay bricks and tiles, and Horsham stone – contributing to high quality vernacular architecture.
- ✓ **Soils** that are distinguished by their variability over short distances – mostly heavy and poorly drained with some coarse-grained, light and free draining.
- ✓ **Heavily channelised and intensively managed river valleys** in the eastern High Weald (Rother, Brede and Tillingham) originating from tidal and freshwater drowning in the Medieval period, with natural floodplain wetlands rare.
- ✓ **A high density of ponds**, five times higher than the national average with a wide range of pond types supporting significant species such as great crested newts and emerald dragonflies.
- ✓ **An oceanic climate** featuring cool temperatures relative to the latitude, a narrow annual temperature range with few extremes, and rain throughout the year.

## Vision

*A landscape in which sustainable land management and action to reduce carbon emissions takes care of the natural resources of geology, soil, landform, and water systems along with their associated heritage assets and biodiversity, whilst delivering a wide range of social, economic and environmental benefits. The approach to land management will take account of, and be partly stimulated by, climate change and rising sea levels.*



Geology landform



Top five issues

- 1. Climate change; the impact of rising temperatures and extreme weather events.
- 2. Pressure on sensitive geological features from invasive species and recreation.
- 3. Soil erosion and the need for soil conservation.
- 4. Diffuse pollution – nutrient, pesticide and fine sediment run-off into ponds, streams and rivers.
- 5. Non-native invasive species in rivers, water bodies and bankside vegetation.

Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

7.6km of eroding sea cliffs designated an SSSI in recognition of the considerable biological, palaeontological, and geological interest.	4,613km of water courses in total, including tributaries and streams.
A unique Lower Cretaceous mammal fauna at Fairlight, one of a handful of localities in the world to have yielded early Cretaceous mammal remains.	13,401 ponds (9/km <sup>2</sup> compared with a national average of 1.8/km <sup>2</sup> ) with an estimated 1600 supporting Great Crested Newts.
671 inland sandstone outcrops.	769 springs.
>315km <sup>2</sup> of undisturbed soils.	Five reservoirs including Bewl Water, the largest body of inland water in the South East.
Crowborough Beacon, the highest point at 242m above sea level.	20km <sup>2</sup> of wetlands including reedbeds, lowland fens, coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, purple moor grass and rush pastures. Home to a rich array of birds including reed warbler and marsh harrier.
Headwaters of seven river catchments – Medway (Beult, Eden and Teise), Rother (Brede and Tillingham), Thames (Mole), Arun, Adur, Ouse and Cuckmere.	Reserves of onshore hydrocarbons.
253km of main river channel supporting nationally rare species such as otter and water vole; and coarse and salmonid fisheries.	A European hotspot for gills.

Objective G1

To restore the natural function of rivers, water courses and water bodies.

Rationale

In order to enhance the role of rivers, water courses and water bodies in increasing biodiversity, improving water quality, protecting people and communities from flooding and promoting enjoyment of the wetland environment.

Indicators of Success

- i. ncreased extent of floodplain woodland and wetland features (Forestry Commission: hectares of new woodland created/ HWJAC: wetland features count)
- ii. All water bodies with either a ‘good’ or ‘high’ ecological and chemical status (Environment Agency: Ecological and chemical classification data)

Objective G2

To protect and enhance soils, sandstone outcrops, and other important landform and geological features.

Rationale

In order to conserve soil health, landform and geology on which the High Weald’s character depends, and maintain nationally important geological exposures, allowing for erosion where appropriate, conserving the fern, moss and liverwort communities they support and protecting their value as significant sites of prehistoric archaeology in the AONB.

Indicators of Success

- i. 100 per cent geological SSSIs in favourable condition (Natural England: SSSI condition)
- ii. Earthworm numbers consistently high across the High Weald (HWJAC: Citizen Science earthworm count)



Objective G3

To help secure climatic conditions and rates of change which support continued conservation and enhancement of the High Weald’s valued landscape and habitats.

Rationale

In order to reduce locally arising greenhouse gas emissions and allow the High Weald to play its role in mitigating climate change.

Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in proportion of total energy demand met by renewable energy generated in the High Weald (HWJAC: compiled, kWh)

Evidence and further reading

- Digital Landscape Cooperative (2009). *Wind Energy Regional Assessment for the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Fisher, K. and Pepper, A. (2009). *River Brede: Modelling of Restoration Options*. Sussex Wildlife Trust.
- *Fracking: How it works, its application and potential in the UK, and how it may affect the High Weald AONB* (2014). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Harris, R.B. (2002). *The Making of the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald AONB: Biodiversity Statement* (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald Management Plan 2019 Consultation Workshop Report: Geology and Water* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald Sandstone Project* (2012). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Kubalikova, L.(2011). *Geology and Geomorphology of the High Weald. Unpublished PhD dissertation*. Internal publication available on request from the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Land Use Consultants and the River Restoration Centre (2002). *The High Weald AONB: Integrated Catchment Management & River Restoration Study*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Non-native Invasive Species Survey: *Upper Rother sub-catchment* (2016). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Pond Conservation (2012). *The national context for the conservation of ponds in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Rother and Romney Catchment Plan: *Research Synthesis* (2015). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- TV Energy Ltd (2011). *High Weald AONB: Energy Use and Generation Audit*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Unconventional hydrocarbon resources in the Weald Basin* (2014). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

‘The oldest task in human history: to live on a piece of land without spoiling it.’

Engineering and Conservation, Aldo Leopold, 1938





Objective G1

To restore the natural function of river catchments.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Restore and create a range of wetland features including ponds, floodplain and wet woodland, bogs and water meadows, targeting support for vulnerable species such as water vole	x	x
Integrate water catchment and land management strategies applying to the High Weald	x	
Consider landscape archaeology in any activities affecting river catchments	x	x
Promote landowner awareness and support dedicated advisors for water and soils management, including identification and eradication of invasive non-native species such as Himalayan balsam and Signal crayfish	x	
Understand flood risk issues, and identify priority areas for natural flood management, supporting demonstration sites for High Weald best practice in Natural Flood Management	x	
Choose solutions (such as clear-span bridges) for footpaths and tracks crossing gills that minimise adverse impacts on river and stream habitats; avoiding new culverts and remove existing culverts where possible	x	x
Avoid development close to water courses that would restrict their natural geomorphological processes and natural flood capacity	x	x
Seek advice on tailoring natural flood management or wetland enhancement measures to the High Weald	x	x
Re-meander and restore channel and floodplain features	x	x
Tailor sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to the landscape character of the High Weald, being aware of possible impacts on vulnerable heritage assets, and considering grey water recycling schemes	x	x
Revise boundary, fertiliser and livestock management, cropping and harvesting practices to reduce diffuse pollution through surface runoff and leaching		x
Establish effective combinations of uncultivated grassland buffer strips and tree planting		x
Ensure alternatives to mains drainage such as septic tanks and cess pits are well maintained and compliant	x	x

Objective G2

To protect sandstone outcrops, soils and other important landform and geological features.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Ensure best practice is complied with to protect soils during construction from compaction, pollution and erosion, and undertake soil health assessments	x	x
Protect undisturbed soils and minimise sterilisation of soils by permanent impermeable surfaces	x	x
Encourage good management practices on geological SSSIs and RIGs and support research to inform their conservation	x	x
Encourage citizen science projects to monitor soil biodiversity	x	
Seek to support, where possible, small scale utilisation of the geological resources e.g. quarried sandstone to provide local materials for construction	x	
Support farmers and landowners wanting to use grass, hedges and trees to protect soils and to reduce soil erosion	x	
Consider minimum tillage to reduce soil erosion and compaction, reverse organic matter decline and improve soil biodiversity		x
Reduce chemical inputs to protect soil organisms and improve biological activity		x
Implement best practice in management of recreational sandstone sites to protect sensitive cryptogams (plants such as ferns and mosses)	x	x
Avoid substantive alterations to landform in development	x	x

Objective G3

To help secure climatic conditions and rates of change which support continued conservation and enhancement of the High Weald's valued landscape and habitats.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Consider AONB characteristics in climate change mitigation and adaption strategies with particular attention paid to achieving reductions in energy demand and supporting alternative sustainable transport options	x	
Support, where possible, landscape-sensitive, small-scale renewable schemes tailored to AONB conservation	x	x
Support fossil fuel-free and public transport initiatives, encouraging walking, cycling and other travel alternatives where possible	x	x
Encourage all new habitable buildings to be constructed using ultra-low energy building techniques, with landscape-sensitive on-site renewable energy generation where appropriate	x	x
Minimise soil disturbance when managing or restoring habitats	x	x
Maximise local timber use in construction	x	x
Reduce by-products which are burnt or sent to landfill from management interventions (consider opportunities for new markets for waste products)	x	







Natural Beauty

# Settlement

The High Weald AONB is characterised by dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads and hamlets, and late Medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.



Key Characteristics

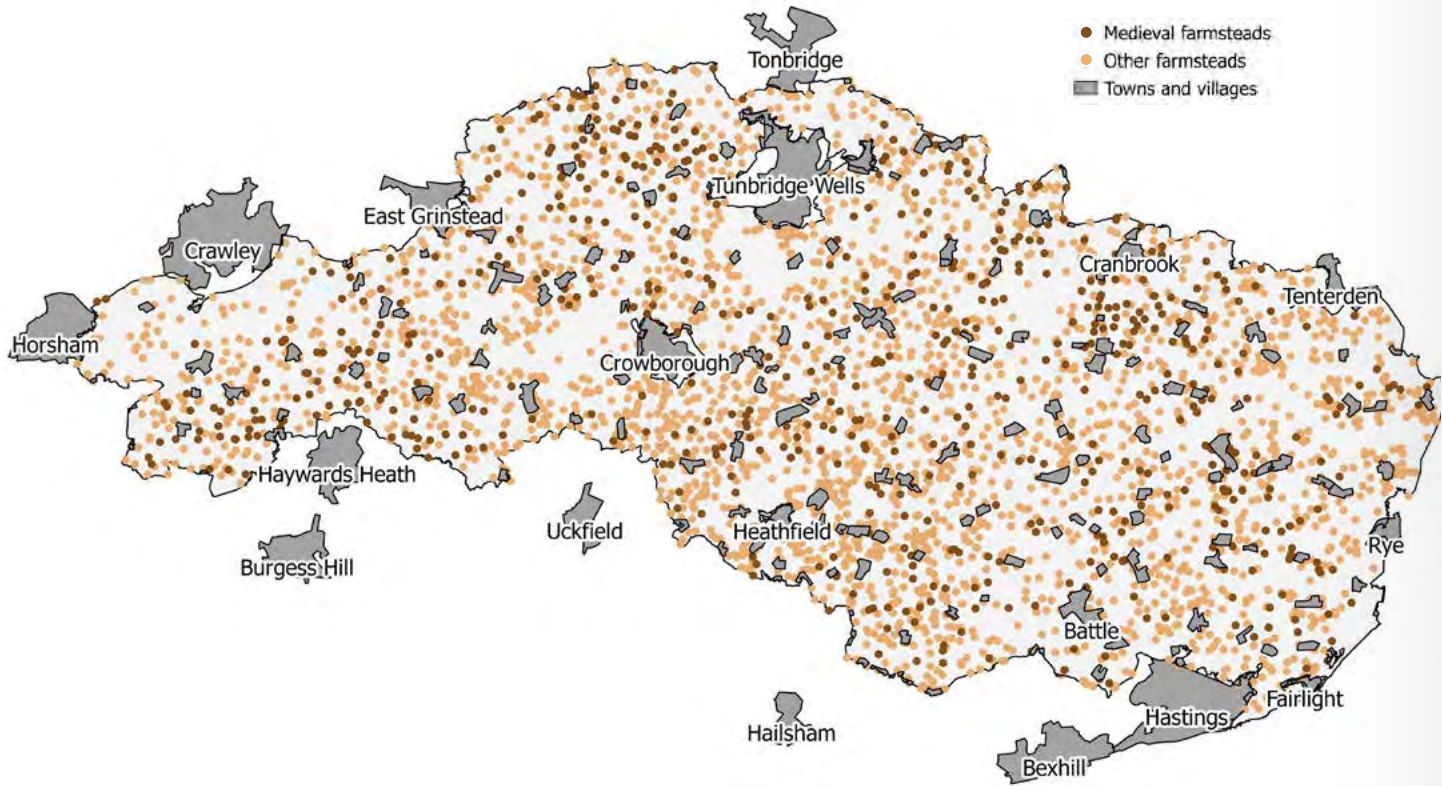
- ✓ **High density of historic farmsteads**, with a long continuity of settlement in the same place; their position strongly influenced by topography and routeways.
- ✓ **Separation between settlements** formed by fields associated with individual historic farmsteads.
- ✓ **Frequent – den and – fold place names** echoing the area’s history of pasturing cattle and pigs.
- ✓ **Farmsteads typically arranged around routeways**, with loose courtyard plan-types common and dispersed plan-types particularly characteristic. Tend to be relatively modest, typically comprising a farmhouse and a barn, often aisled to at least one side with small-scale ancillary structures, mostly for cattle, which face into their own, generally small, yards.
- ✓ **High numbers of pre-1750 timber-framed farm buildings** with typologies representing locally-distinctive historic agricultural practices, including oasts and other structures associated with the hop industry (hop-pickers’ huts); where a complete range exists, these are rare and particularly significant.
- ✓ **Hamlets occurring around the junction of routeways** or small commons (which became greens or forstals), or as clusters of cottages serving a particular industry.
- ✓ **Pockets of small wayside cottages** (peasant settlement enclosing roadside commons or later worker cottages) interspaced with fields.
- ✓ **Villages and towns of Medieval origin** located at historic focal points or along ridge top roads; typically open areas used for meeting places and trade, with ‘markets’ granted for Burwash, Robertsbridge, Salehurst, Wadhurst, Cranbrook and Frant in the 13th century, and for Ticehurst, Lamberhurst, Heathfield, Rotherfield and Hawkurst in the early 14th century.
- ✓ **Absence of large scale settlement extensions** after AONB designation in 1983.
- ✓ **No significant nucleated settlements** before the 13th century (apart from Battle).
- ✓ **Deer parks** and later 18th century estates.
- ✓ **Distinctive settlement types** and pattern in the eastern High Weald relating to history of the Rother estuary and river trade.
- ✓ **High concentrations of historic buildings** in all settlement types, many listed, whose form and appearance reflects historic and socio-cultural functions (such as the prevalence of craft industries), with locally distinctive typologies, including Medieval Wealden Hall houses (found either as rural farmhouses, or incorporated into the fabric of villages and towns, and often much disguised through later alterations), and features such as catslide roofs.
- ✓ **Villages and hamlets typically unlit** contributing to intrinsically dark landscapes.
- ✓ **A limited palette of local materials**: clay as tiles and brick, timber as weatherboard and framing, and some localised instances of stone.
- ✓ **Green-ness of roads and streets** with trees, hedges and verges dominant.

Vision

*A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of settlement is protected in a way that positively contributes to the natural environment and improves the connections between settlements and the countryside. Appropriately worded land use planning policies within relevant development plans allow for affordable housing and workspace for local needs while ensuring that settlements retain their distinctiveness and individual historic buildings, and conservation areas and buried archaeological remains are conserved and enhanced as appropriate.*



Settlements



Top five issues

- 1. Increase in greenfield development pressure for housing threatening the character of the AONB.
- 2. Generic layout and design of new housing developments failing to respond to, or reinforce AONB character.
- 3. Erosion of AONB character through suburbanisation, including pressure for residential intensification unrelated to land management outside of towns and villages, large/landscape-intrusive replacement dwellings, and smaller interventions, boundary treatments etc., which have a cumulative effect.
- 4. Declining housing affordability, including lack of social housing and key worker housing suitable for land-based workers.
- 5. Fragmentation and suburbanisation of historic farmsteads, and the conversion of agricultural buildings to residential use with the loss of agricultural/economic functional relationship with land.

Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

17 market towns and villages with populations >2,000, the largest being Battle with a population >6,000.

11% households classified as isolated farms (compared with an average of 8% across all protected landscapes).

98.3% households in areas classified as rural.

>3,500 historic farmsteads.

5,274 listed buildings.

57 Medieval parish churches.

50 registered parks and gardens.

64 village conservation areas.

91 scheduled ancient monuments.

Objective S1

To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside.

Rationale

To understand and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the relationship with the surrounding countryside and wild species, that defines sustainable rural settlement. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports land management objectives and AONB designation.

Indicators of Success

- i. Improved conditions for land-based businesses to flourish (HWJAC: land-based business survey)
- ii. Increased procurement by public bodies of goods and services which support AONB landscape conservation (HWJAC: procurement practices survey)

Objective S2

To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement.

Rationale

To protect the distinctive character of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads and to maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation) between such settlements that contribute to local identity.

Indicators of Success

- i. Physical and perceived separation between settlements maintained (HWJAC: settlement separation mapping)
- ii. Greater proportion of new homes delivered through re-development or small developments (HWJAC: local authority statistics)

‘Places and buildings... tend to be enriching elements in the sum of scenic beauty’

Report on National Parks 1945

Objective S3

To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure development reflects the character of the High Weald in its scale, layout and design.

Rationale

To protect and enhance the character and quality of buildings in the High Weald, and re-establish the use of local materials as a means of protecting the environment and adding to this distinctiveness.

Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in new developments according with AONB design guidance (HWJAC: local authority statistics)

Evidence and further reading

- Landscape Character Assessments (various). County and District Councils.
- Bannister, N. (2011). *Commons, Greens and Settlements in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Chester-Kadwell, B. (2011). *Single Storey, Twentieth Century Dwellings in the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Bannister, N.R. (2011). *Commons, Greens and Settlement in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Bibby, P. (2007). *Historic Farm Complexes in Current Socio-economic Context: High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Chester-Kadwell, B. (2011). *Single Storey, Twentieth Century Dwellings in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Edwards, B. and Lake, J. (2008). *Historic Farmsteads: A Manual for Mapping*. English Heritage and Forum Heritage Services.
- English Heritage (2007). *National Character Area 122: High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Farmsteads Assessment Guidance: Supplementary Planning Document (2016). Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.
- Field Systems in the High Weald: A Landscape Approach to Assessment (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Forum Heritage Services (2007). *Historic Farmsteads and Landscape Character in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Harris, R. B. (2002). *The Making of the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Harris, R. B. (2011). *Settlement: A summary of Historic Ssettlement in the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Herlin Sarlov, I. and Owen, S. (2007). *The Sustainable Development of Dispersed Settlement in the High Weald AONB*. Countryside and Community Research Institute.
- High Weald Management Plan 2019 Consultation Workshop Report: Settlement (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Housing Needs Survey of Rural Workers in the High Weald: Forestry and Coppice Workers (2009). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- An Integrated Approach to Defining Sustainable Development Criteria in Spatial Planning (2010). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Jones, P. J. et al. (2009). *The Potential for the High Weald to Supply the Food Needs of its Population Under Conventional and Organic Agriculture*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Land Use Consultants (2006). *Sustainable Settlements in the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Martin, D. and Martin, B. (2009). *Farm Buildings of the Weald*. Heritage Publications.
- Waygood, J. (2017). *High Weald AONB Colour Study: Guidance of the Selection and Use of Colour in Development*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee





Objective S1

To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Preferentially select goods and services which support AONB landscape conservation in procurement decisions e.g. locally produced food, fuel, fencing, timber for construction	x	x
Provide guidance on affordable housing provision and homes for rural workers	x	
Seek to support community agriculture and small-scale horticulture	x	x
Support activities which celebrate and promote local products and services	x	x
Implement education initiatives to promote understanding of and engagement with local food networks	x	x
Protect allotments from development or damage	x	
Require developments to maximise measurable gains for biodiversity and opportunities for birds, bats and other wild native species in the design of buildings, curtilages and open spaces	x	
Make space for wildlife to thrive around buildings, gardens and urban spaces	x	x
Collaborate with neighbours to deliver landscape scale conservation management and sustainable food production	x	x

Objective S2

To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Ensure there is reference to the AONB Management Plan in local plans and other public documents, and ensure its use as material consideration in planning decisions	x	
Require an archaeological assessment for the development affecting historic farmsteads	x	
Publish annual statistics on the rate of development and other land use change in the AONB	x	
Identify and map areas of separation between settlements and links with green infrastructure across settlements	x	
Promote use of the High Weald Design Guide and historic characterisation to guide settlement planning	x	x
Extend farmstead assessment guidance across the AONB	x	
Protect the relationship between historic settlement and its associated green spaces and routeways	x	x
Seek to prioritise the delivery of new housing primarily through small-scale development and a mix of housing sizes that responds to local needs	x	
Produce guidance on the use of Historic Landscape Characterisation to ensure the historic character of settlements, and the historic landscape associated with them, is considered in development proposals	x	x

Objective S3

To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure development reflects the character of the High Weald in its scale, layout and design.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Promote the High Weald Design Guide and apply to housing development in the AONB, and publish good practice case studies demonstrating application of the High Weald Design Guide	x	x
Describe and promote traditional architectural detailing	x	x
Promote and utilise the High Weald Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development	x	x
Increase local listing and support a listed building review to tackle the under-listing of historic farm buildings	x	
Facilitate improved links between those specifying construction details and suppliers of construction materials produced from the AONB landscape	x	x
Support innovation in timber technology and its use in construction	x	x
Promote architectural competitions and award schemes to encourage affordable and sustainable construction appropriate to AONB character	x	x
Ensure the design and maintenance of highways and the public realm, including street furniture, has regard to local distinctive character and avoids suburbanisation or generic approaches	x	
Protect and preserve the character of small traditional structures such as cattle sheds and hoppers' huts	x	x
Utilise AONB design guidance for new housing development	x	x
Use local fencing materials or native planting for boundaries	x	x
Reflect local landscape character and use of local provenance species in new landscaping scheme ensuring improved connectivity	x	x

‘[Development should be] fully sympathetic to, and in scale with, the land use and local building style’

Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission, speaking about designated landscapes in 1959.





## Natural Beauty

# Routeways

The High Weald AONB is characterised by historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths), the oldest being in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. These are often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.

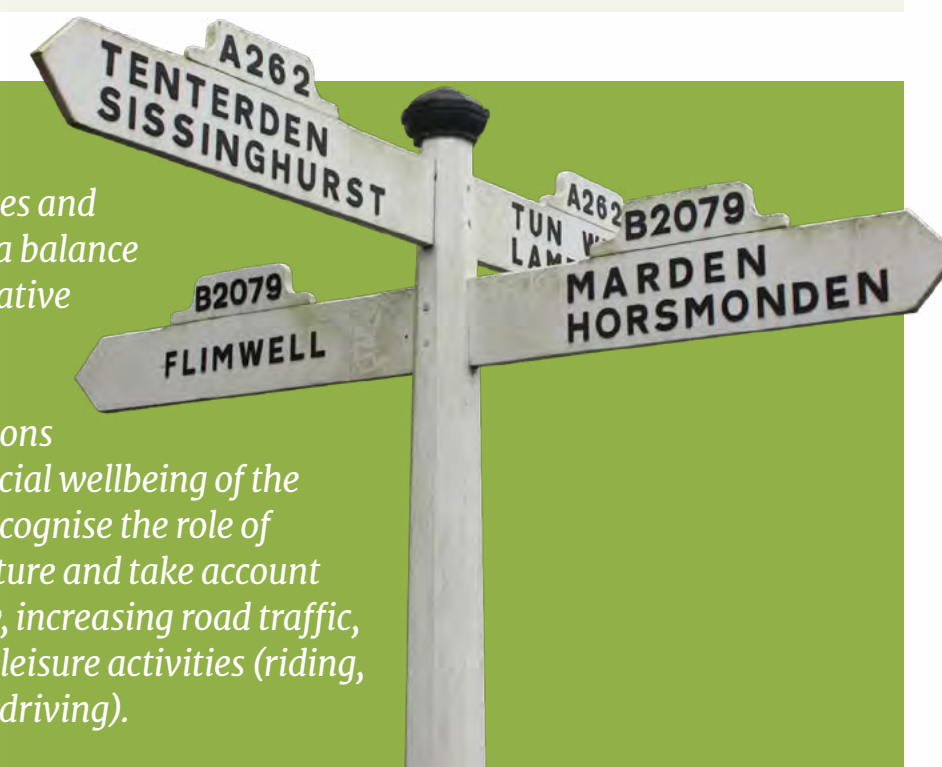


## Key characteristics

- ✓ **A dense radiating network** with a variety of origins including:
  - Droveways, used for moving livestock, radiating out to pre-historic sites on the edge of the Weald
  - Ridgeways on high ground and often running east-west, closely associated with pre-historic sites and Medieval trading settlements
  - Roman roads cutting across these patterns and strongly associated with iron-working sites.
- ✓ **Typically present by the 14th century**, with many extending back into pre-history and pre-dating settlements.
- ✓ **Sunken routeways** ('holloways') found on sloping land as a result of long use and erosion combined with water run-off.
- ✓ **'Braiding'** common resulting from people, animals and vehicles finding alternative routes through impassable areas.
- ✓ **Earth banks, lynchets and ditches** typically indicating the former width of the routeway or to separate users from farmland or woodland.
- ✓ **Wide flowery grass verges** common, indicating the historic width of routeways and their function as linear common grazing.
- ✓ **Small-scale variations in habitat** associated with a complex mixture of substrates, aspects and moisture levels supporting a rich biodiversity, especially invertebrates.
- ✓ **Frequent sandstone exposures**, adding diverse assemblages of specialist plants and animals.
- ✓ **Linear nature** facilitating foraging and dispersal, and contributing significantly to the ecological interconnectedness of the High Weald.
- ✓ **Veteran trees and ancient roadside coppice** (often showing evidence of laying) frequent, providing niches for lichens and deadwood-dependent beetles.
- ✓ **Many lost, stopped or diverted routeways** evidenced by holloways, earth banks and depressions in the ground.
- ✓ **Associated heritage features** – pre-1964 fingerposts, 'black and white' road signs, roadside milestones – common.
- ✓ **Archaeology and cultural associations** in the eastern High Weald from trade and the practice of exporting heavy goods (e.g. timber and iron) by floating them at high tide on waterways navigable until the late 13th century.

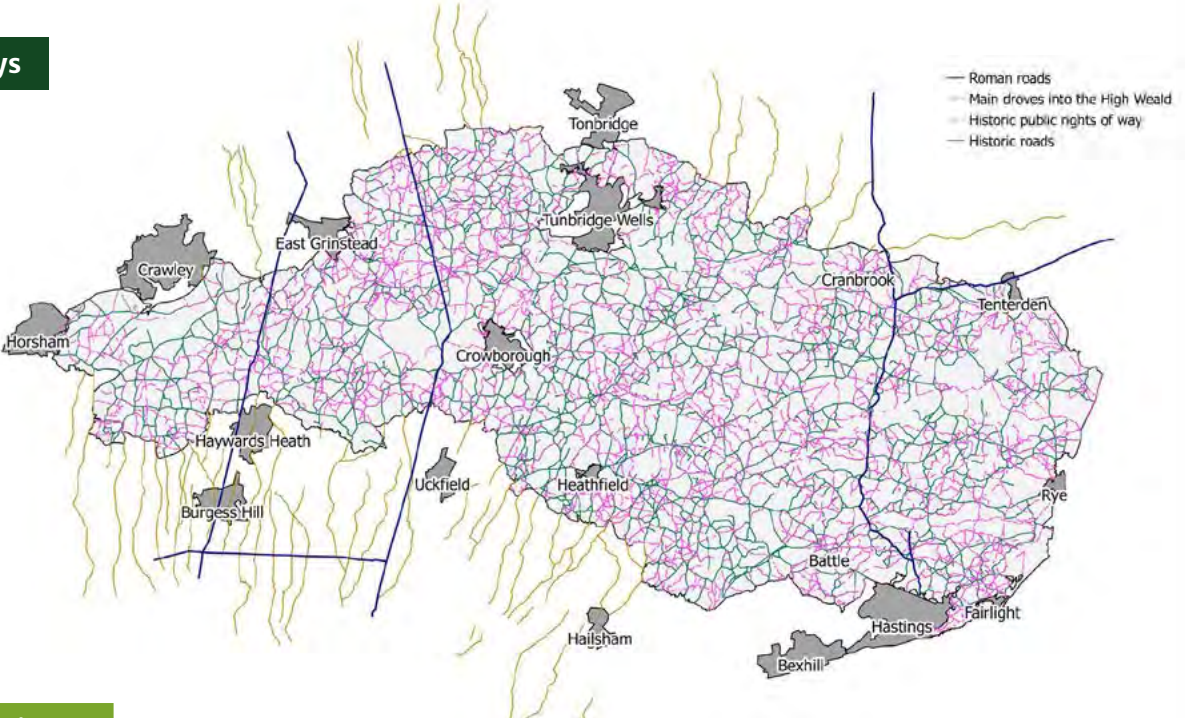
## Vision

*A landscape in which the character of the distinctive lanes and rights of way is protected and a balance achieved between the comparative quietness and rurality of the roads of the High Weald and their function as communications central to the economic and social wellbeing of the area. The management will recognise the role of routeways as green infrastructure and take account of, and be partly stimulated by, increasing road traffic, safety concerns and increased leisure activities (riding, cycling, walking and off-road driving).*





Routeways



Top five issues

- 1. Diversions of public rights of way from the historic route.
- 2. Damage from the erection of fences; flytipping, development and ploughing.
- 3. Insensitive management of veteran trees and roadside coppice including practice of ‘chip and smother’; and inappropriate management of flowery grassland on verges.
- 4. Insensitive highway engineering including passing bays, deep visibility splays to entrances, and suburban signage and lighting.
- 5. Damage to narrow roads and BOATs (Byways Open to all Traffic) by motor vehicles and wide agricultural machinery, particularly in wet conditions.

Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

2,570km of public rights of way.

More than 75% of public rights of way are historic (i.e. present on Ordnance Survey maps from at least 1860).

1,873km roads.

More than 80% of roads are historic (i.e. in existence since at least 1800).

The High Weald is crossed by one the most famous routeways in English history – the one that took King Harold’s army from victory at Stamford Bridge to defeat at Hastings in 1066.

Two main Roman roads (London–Lewes and London–Hassocks/Brighton).

Droveways dating to the Anglo-Saxon period and earlier for moving livestock (pigs and cattle).

More than 4400km highly interconnected green infrastructure bounded by flower-rich verges, hedges and woods.

Evidence and further reading

- High Weald AONB: Biodiversity Statement (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
- Harris, R. (2003). The Making for the High Weald. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Historic Routeway Survey Pack (2011). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Lake, J. (2018) Routeways of the High Weald: Their function, history and character. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Sansum, P. (2013). Woodland in the High Weald AONB: An overview of its character and significance. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

Objective R1 To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways.

Rationale

To maintain a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands and identity, and is a rare UK survival of an essentially Medieval landscape; and to protect the individual archaeological features of historic routeways.

Indicators of Success

- i. Fewer public rights of way diversions on historic routeways (HWJAC: local authority footpath diversion statistics)

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Discourage new access points that damage the character of sunken routeways or dilute the pattern of routeways	x	x
Give consideration to the historic alignment of roads, tracks and paths in decision making	x	x
Support the identification, retention and restoration of traditional fingerposts, boundary stones and turnpike features (e.g. milestone and toll houses), adding to the relevant Historic Environment Record where appropriate	x	x
Identify historic routeways in highway improvement plans and consider management tailored to enhance their historic character including early intervention to protect banks	x	
Invest in creative highway engineering solutions, delivering quality, best practice highway alterations which are sensitive to AONB character	x	x
Identify and protect above ground and below ground archaeology (including braided multiple ditch and back systems associated with braided tracks) in any works so as to affect routeways, adding to the relevant Historic Environment Record where appropriate	x	x
Ensure that routeways are recognised as non-designated heritage assets in the planning process	x	
Provide archaeological training for highway engineers and management contractors	x	
Avoid fencing and other activity such as the use of inappropriate machinery which damages routeway archaeology (including ditches and banks) or that alters its historic alignment	x	x

Objective R2 To enhance the ecological function of routeways.

Rationale

To protect, and improve the condition of, the complex mix of small scale habitats along routeways for wildlife, and maintain routeway boundaries as part of a highly interconnected habitat mosaic.

Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in proportion of designated wildlife verges with tailored management regimes (HWJAC: local authority highway management data)

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support the enhancement of verges, especially verges in new developments, with local provenance grassland species	x	x
Identify ecologically-rich historic routeways in biodiversity and green infrastructure planning	x	
Prioritise the appropriate management of ecologically-rich road verges in highway management and avoid damaging operations such as ‘chip and smother’	x	
Provide ecological training for highway management engineers and contractors to ensure all roadside verges are managed sensitively for biodiversity	x	
Encourage investment in the identification of ecologically rich roadside verges, including community schemes to identify ecologically-rich roadside verges, and enhance others with local provenance wild grassland species	x	x
Avoid vehicular traffic on sensitive routeway verges, particularly when the ground is wet	x	x
Undertake sensitive management of old coppice on routeway banks	x	x
Maintain routeway verges in their ‘natural state’ and refrain from planting non-native species along routeways	x	x







Natural Beauty

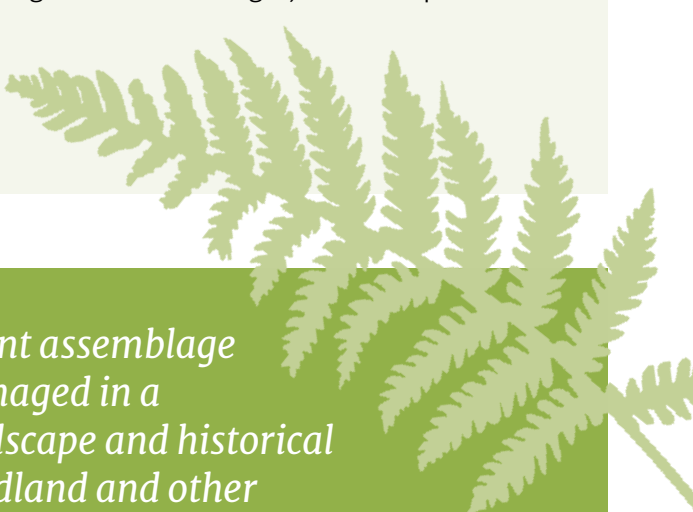
# Woodland

The High Weald AONB is characterised by the great extent of ancient woods, gills, and shaws in smallholdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.



## Key Characteristics

- ✓ **Highly interconnected** and structurally varied mosaic of many small woods, larger forests and numerous linear gill woodlands, shaws, wooded routeways and outgrown hedges.
- ✓ **High proportion of ancient woodland** typically broadleaved coppice with a rich ground flora.
- ✓ **Many irregularly-shaped** small woodlands interlinked with shaws, thick hedges and wooded sunken lanes; forming an intimate part of the farmed landscape.
- ✓ **A few very large woods** lying mostly along the high sandy ridges; remnants of the area's Medieval forests.
- ✓ **High density of gill woodlands** (deeply incised ravines with particularly humid and relatively stable microclimates) – the oldest and least disturbed woodland in the South East – supporting a community of plants, vascular and non-vascular, not found together anywhere else in Europe, and important for rare plant species such as small-leaved lime, hay-scented buckler fern, Tunbridge filmy-fern, and rare invertebrates including beetles and molluscs.
- ✓ **Frequent patches of wet woodland** associated with surface water in the form of steep sided streams, springs, wet flushes and water-filled extraction pits, important for regionally-distinctive species such as smooth-stalked sedge.
- ✓ **A stronghold for characteristic species** such as dormice, and remnant populations of rare species such as pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.
- ✓ **Considerable variability** in woodland types and tree forms over short distances reflecting the variety of soils, micro-climates and drainage conditions (Principle NVC communities are W10 and W8 with some W15 and W16 on sandier ridges).
- ✓ **Wood-pasture and parkland**, mostly originating from once extensive historic deer parks supporting veteran/ancient trees and their associated wildlife.
- ✓ **Nationally significant resource** of epiphytic and dead-wood dependent species supported by a wealth of veteran trees.
- ✓ **A strong commercial woodland industry** focused on coppice and locally grown hardwoods.
- ✓ **A culture of small-scale management** by people using hand tools to produce a wide variety of products mostly for local use.
- ✓ **Visible evidence of historic use** and exploitation (including coppice stools, stubs, pollards, boundary bank and ditch systems, routes and tracks; remains of Roman and Medieval iron-working such as slag heaps and ponds, and large earthworks relating to the harnessing of water power to fuel furnaces, forges and mills).
- ✓ **Trees used for boundary markers** (including outgrown old laid hedges; stubs and pollards).

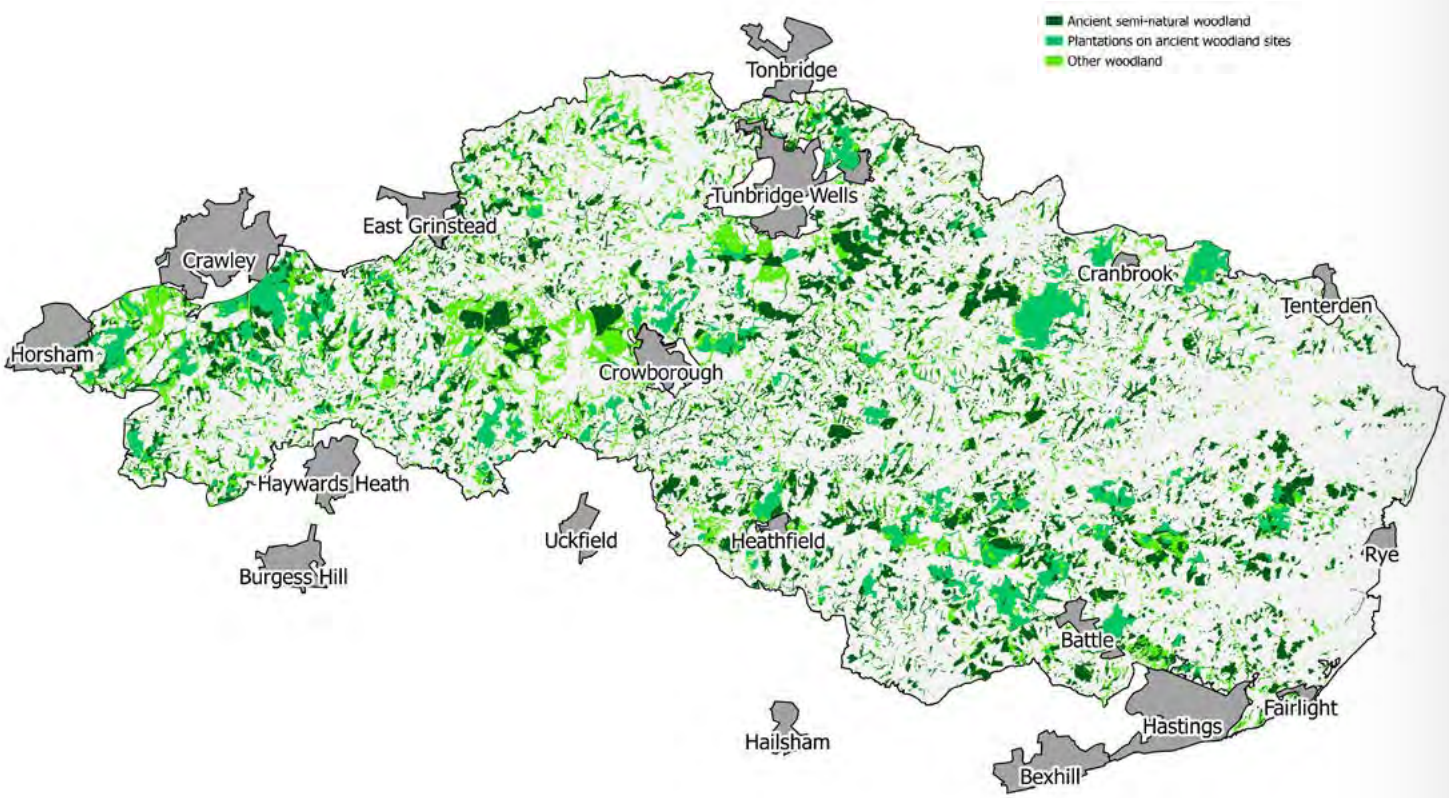


## Vision

*A landscape in which the nationally-important assemblage of ancient woodland in the High Weald is managed in a sustainable way to maximise its wildlife, landscape and historical value. Within this, connectivity between woodland and other habitats is enhanced, archaeology protected, sensitive use for leisure and recreation encouraged, and traditional woodland management active in producing high-quality timber and underwood to supply local markets.*



Woodland map



Top five issues

- 1. Low value bulk markets for timber improving but procurement practices and lack of investment restricting market growth for higher value locally-sourced wood products.
- 2. Changing management, particularly cessation of traditional coppicing affecting ground flora and species associated with coppicing such as fritillaries.
- 3. Predicted increase in tree diseases, partly through imported stock or soil.
- 4. Invasive and damaging species including rhododendron, deer and grey squirrel.
- 5. Impact of increasing mechanisation and machinery size on soils, small-scale habitat variability and archaeology.

Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

28% woodland cover (nearly 3x national average).

83% broadleaved woodland the majority as coppice.

Highest coverage of ancient woodland in any protected landscape (3/4 all woodland or 19% land cover) covering 273km² of undisturbed woodland soil.

>2,800 parcels of ancient woodland under 2 ha.

Nationally significant: 8% of England’s ancient woodland resource.

<32% ancient woodland classified as PAWs.

191km² gill woodland in > 1,200 sites supporting internationally rare cryptogams.

56km² UK BAP priority habitat: wood pasture and parkland.

In excess of 7.5m tonnes of carbon stored in woodlands and their soils with an additional > 0.75m tonnes sequestered every year.

3km² traditional orchards containing 34 apple varieties.

Active commercial coppice industry with intergenerational woodland workers.

Objective W1

To maintain the existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland.

Rationale

To maintain irreplaceable habitats for biodiversity, to maintain a key component of the cultural landscape, and to maintain contribution to carbon storage.

Indicators of Success

- i. No loss of ancient woodland (HWJAC: Ancient Woodland Inventory statistics)

Objective W2

To enhance the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.

Rationale

To increase the viability of the woodland habitat for wildlife, by identifying and extending the area of appropriately managed woodland (including restoring plantations on ancient woodland) to link and enhance isolated habitats and species populations, providing greater connectivity between woodlands and other important wildlife areas, and helping to facilitate species’ response to climate change.

Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in proportion of woodland managed to remove invasive species (Forestry Commission: Woodland Grant data)
- ii. Increase in woodland dependent butterflies (Butterfly Conservation: Butterfly count in sample areas)
- iii. Length of hedges restored or replanted (HWJAC: multiple sources/sample areas)



Objective W3

To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.

Rationale

To protect the historic environment of the AONB woodlands.

Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in Historic Environment Records (HER) for woodlands (HWJAC: County HERs statistics)

Objective W4

To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.

Rationale

To achieve the most effective management that will deliver the other objectives for woodland, to contribute to sustainable domestic timber production, and to support a working countryside.

Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in scale and numbers of businesses milling local timber: (HWJAC: Business survey)

Evidence and further reading

- Bannister, N.R. (2009). *Medieval Deer Parks and Designed Landscapes in the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Bannister, N. R. and McKernan, P. (2007). *The Cultural Heritage of Woodlands in the South East*. South East AONBs Woodland Programme.
- Greenaway, T., Roper, P. and Ryland, K. (2004). *Wooded Heaths in the High Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Greig, S. (2010). *High Weald Woodlands: Carbon Report*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- High Weald AONB: *Biodiversity Statement* (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- High Weald *Management Plan 2019 Consultation Workshop Report: Woodlands* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Sansum, P. (2013). *Woodland in the High Weald AONB: An overview of its character and significance*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Sansum, P. (2014). *An overview of the character and ecological significance of gill woodland in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Simpson, J. and Smith, J. (2017). *Dallington Forest Ancient and Veteran Tree Survey*. High Weald AONB: *Biodiversity Statement* (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Weald and Downs Ancient Woodland Survey (2007–2012). *High Weald District Reports for Ashford, Hastings, Mid Sussex, Rother, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Well, Wealden, West Sussex*.





Objective W1

To maintain the existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Resist development that risks the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland or veteran trees	x	
Carefully assess opportunities for woodland expansion and their impact on vulnerable non-wooded habitats and cultural landscape prioritising expansion of wet woodland, and the buffering and interlinking of gill and small woodlands through natural regeneration on non-sensitive open habitats together with enhancement of other semi-natural habitats	x	x
Recognise the ecological value of old growth secondary woodland and ensure detailed ecological surveys are carried out if change is proposed	x	x
Ensure ancient wood-pasture and historic parkland are identified and receive the same consideration as other forms of ancient woodland	x	x
Avoid soil damaging activity, such as the use of heavy machinery in wet conditions		
Maintain stock-proof fences around ancient woodland to avoid livestock damage		x

Objective W2

To enhance the ecological functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support appropriate management of woodlands focusing on hand cutting and small-scale machinery adapted to High Weald specific conditions	x	x
Recognise the value of wooded heath and seek to accommodate sustainable heathland restoration where appropriate	x	x
Protect the characteristic species of all woodland	x	x
Target rhododendron and other damaging invasive plants for eradication in ancient woodland, prioritising rhododendron removal from gill woodland	x	x
Ensure a minimum15m buffer and seek to secure larger buffer zones to protect ancient woodland and veteran trees from the detrimental effects of nearby developments, including predation by cats	x	x
Support locally grown and local provenance stock for tree planting and avoid imported stock or soil	x	x
Support landscape scale initiatives to reverse the decline in key woodland species and protect and enhance vulnerable habitats such as gill woodlands and wet woodland	x	
Promote UK tree and plant health biosecurity policies and ensure effective communication between forest managers and plant health specialists	x	x
Support an inventory of veteran trees	x	x
Seek to retain and secure appropriate management of woodlands for ecological benefits in, and adjacent to, housing development and, where possible, provide new areas of trees and coppice	x	x
Increase cooperation between owners of woodlots and support collaboration and community led woodland management	x	x
Foster natural regeneration in ancient woodland and avoid planting for non-timber purposes	x	x
Protect ancient woodland soil from heavy machinery damage	x	x
Support restoration of planted ancient woodland sites (PAWS) to deciduous woodland	x	x
Avoid or minimise uses that affect ground flora through trampling or disturbance	x	x
Avoid leaving chipped mulch on ancient woodland soil	x	x
Support research into new species and new management techniques to meet the challenges of a changing climate	x	x
Use local provenance bare-rooted stock for tree planting	x	x

Objective W3

To protect the archaeology and historic assets of AONB woodlands.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Require soil conservation and woodland archaeology training for woodland managers operating on public land, and for those receiving public grants for forestry machinery	x	
Require a desk-based archaeological assessment for woodlands affected by development, supported where appropriate by a field assessment	x	
Include mapped historic environment data in licence agreements	x	x
Undertake woodland archaeology surveys and provide data to county Historic Environment Records	x	x
Identify and avoid archaeological features in woodland management operations	x	x
Undertake woodland archaeology surveys and provide data to county Historic Environment Records	x	x

Objective W4

To increase the output of sustainably produced high-quality timber and underwood for local markets.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
In planning conditions and public procurement, where possible, specify local timber for outdoor furniture, fencing and weatherboard	x	
Seek to foster forestry operations – usually small scale and traditional management – that do not damage characteristic habitats and species	x	x
Support forest skills training within the sector and for new entrants	x	x
Incentivise the use of local wood in construction and seek to support timber yards that can process local wood to produce building grade timber	x	x
Recognise market distortion effect of low transport costs and focus forestry industry support and funding on local SME businesses	x	x
Seek to set up an innovation fund to develop new technologies, products and services supporting AONB woodland management objectives	x	
Support training in woodland management, timber conversion and craft skills	x	x
Choose fencing and gates made from local timber such as chestnut post-and-rail fencing and hazel or chestnut hurdles	x	x
Seek to use local timber for furniture and construction	x	x
Support collaboration initiatives for critical threats such as deer and grey squirrels, including trials of new approaches to control and support for deer larders and other initiatives to enable longer term success	x	x





## Natural Beauty

# Field and heath

The High Weald AONB is characterised by small, irregularly-shaped and productive fields often bounded by (and forming a mosaic with) hedgerows and small woodlands, and typically used for livestock grazing; smallholdings; and a non-dominant agriculture; within which can be found distinctive zones of lowland heath and inned river valleys.

## Key characteristics

- ✓ **A generally irregular field pattern** with individual fields relatively small (<3 hectares).
- ✓ **Fieldscape dominated by historic farmsteads** surrounded by their own fields resulting from Medieval farming in severalty i.e. land held by individuals rather than in common.
- ✓ **Strong influence exerted by topography** with many field systems aligned to or 'hanging' from (at right angles to) linear features such as watercourses or ridge-top roads.
- ✓ **Predominantly pastoral mixed farming** with an absence of industrial scale livestock farming.
- ✓ **Fields mostly used for grazing** livestock with some small-scale horticulture and cropping.
- ✓ **Medieval character dominant** with a high proportion of field systems created by assarting (woodland clearance) with sinuous mixed woody boundaries and thick hedges common.
- ✓ **Boundary ditch and bank features** typical, along woodland edges or topped with hedges and veteran trees.
- ✓ **Nationally important fragments of unimproved neutral grassland** (habitat type MG5 and variants), often small and isolated, supporting an incredibly rich variety of plants, animals, waxcaps and other fungi.
- ✓ **High proportion of good quality flowery grassland** acting as a buffer for, and link to, fragments of unimproved grassland.
- ✓ **Traditional orchards** scattered across the landscape providing dead and decaying wood for invertebrates, and a mosaic of other habitats.
- ✓ **Ashdown Forest** (an extensive area of common land and one of the largest continuous blocks of lowland heath, semi-natural woodland and valley bog in the South East) supporting internationally important populations of nightjar and Dartford warbler.
- ✓ **Distinctive areas of wooded heath** and Lowland heath scattered along the sandy ridges supporting a complex mosaic of plant communities, rare species such as marsh clubmoss, and more than half of UK's dragonfly species.

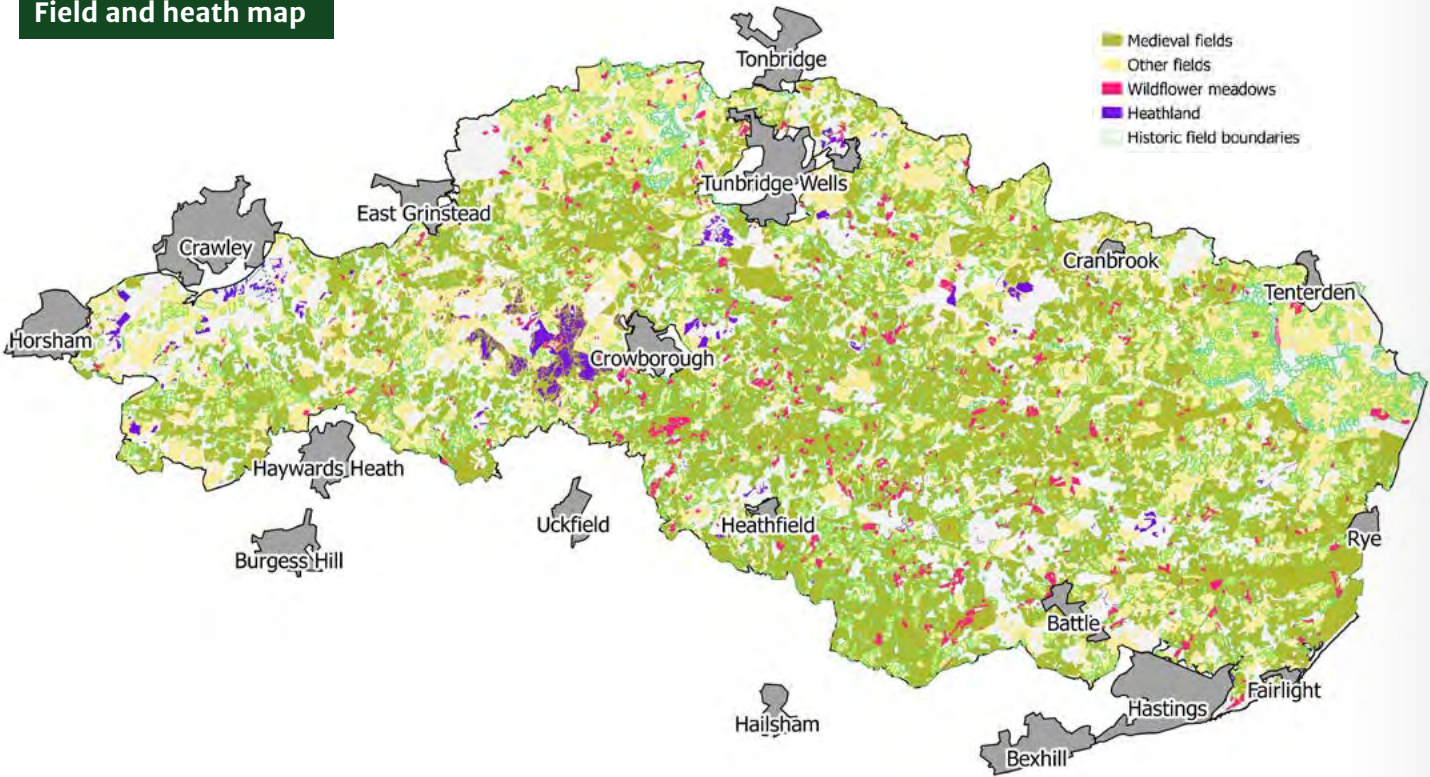


## Vision

*A landscape in which the distinctive and historic pattern of fields is managed to maximise its full landscape, historic and wildlife value, and in which nature recovery networks have enhanced the special qualities of grassland and lowland heath habitats which are maintained where necessary by skilled land managers. Agricultural land is productive managed through restorative agriculture, small-scale agro-forestry and the growing of vegetables, fruit and salad crops, with some wilded areas to serve as refuges; all delivering public benefits including responsible access and enjoyment by the public.*



Field and heath map



Top five issues

- 1. Fragmentation of farm holdings due to an increase in non-farming land ownership.
- 2. Loss of agricultural skills and knowledge, and reduction in livestock grazing leading to loss of farm infrastructure and degradation of pasture and soils.
- 3. Increasing costs of managing associated habitats such as hedgerows, exacerbated by reduction in agri-environmental funding for some operations.
- 4. Loss of green fields to development and infrastructure, or conversion to other land uses such as planting of new woodlands.
- 5. Difficulties of access to small, isolated sites and lack of grazing infrastructure including fencing and livestock.

Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

>1,500 farm holdings (2nd highest number of holdings in an AONB) with >750 livestock holdings.

65% land is registered with the Rural Payments Agency with 17,000 parcels of land <1.5ha.

Average farm size is less than half the national average.

70% remain unaffected by reorganisation in the late 20th century.

>12,500km of hedgerows and field boundaries providing homes for pollinating insects and a source of wild food.

220km<sup>2</sup> land owned by conservation organisations or designated under international or UK law to protect wildlife including 64km<sup>2</sup> internationally important sites and 51 SSSI's covering 55km<sup>2</sup>.

<3% land cover known wildflower meadows with estimated <40% fields semi-improved grassland with potential for enhancement.

Nearly 50% of AONB supported by government-funded schemes to encourage (NE, 2013) environmentally sensitive land management.

85% land is Grade 3 and 4 with no Grade 1 and 2.5% Grade 2.

<5% agricultural holders under 35 years old.

Steep decline in livestock numbers with sheep and cattle numbers down by one-third since 2000.

Objective FH1

To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.

Rationale

To contribute to sustainable domestic food and non-food agricultural production, to support a working countryside, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non-sustainably managed agricultural land and the need for long-distance transport that produces air pollutants, causing harm to health and the environment.

Indicators of success

- i. Maintenance of land registered for grazing animals (RPA: area extent)

Objective FH2

To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.

Rationale

To maintain fields and field boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; and to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially Medieval landscape.

Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in hedges restored and new hedges planted (HWJAC: total hedgerow extent in sample areas)
- ii. No loss of Medieval field systems (HWJAC: area of intact field systems in sample areas)

*‘The existence of a flourishing and progressive agriculture is fundamental to... the preservation and enhancement of the characteristic landscape.’*

Report of the National Parks Committee, Sir Arthur Hobhouse 1947

Objective FH3

To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.

Rationale

To improve the condition, landscape permeability and connectivity of fields and heaths and their associated and interrelated habitats (such as hedges, woodlands, ditches, ponds and water systems) for wildlife.

Indicators of Success

- i. No loss of species rich grassland (HWJAC & Biological Records Centres: Inventory and priority habitat data)
- ii. No loss of lowland heath (HWJAC & Biological Records Centres: Inventory and priority habitat data)
- iii. Increase in connectivity of species-rich grassland (HWJAC & Biological Records Centres: connectivity measure in sample areas)

Objective FH4

To protect the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath.

Rationale

To protect the historic environment of the AONB other than the pattern of fields: i.e. the individual archaeological features.

Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in Historic Environment Records for non-wooded habitats (HWJAC & Historic Environment Record Centres: Number of HER records)

Evidence and further reading

- Dolphin Ecological services (2013). *Grassland SSCI Review*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Fields in the High Weald: *An Overview of Their Social, Ecological and Economic Value* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Field systems in the High Weald: *A Landscape Approach to Assessment* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Field systems in the High Weald: Character Statement* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Field systems in the High Weald: Research History* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald AONB: Biodiversity Statement* (2013). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *High Weald Management Plan 2019 Consultation Workshop Report: Field and Heath* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Jones, P.J. et al. (2009). *Potential of the High Weald to Supply the Food Needs of its Population under Conventional and Organic Agriculture*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Vorley, B. (2014) *Restocking the Weald*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.





Objective FH1

To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support existing agricultural infrastructure, food processing facilities and local farmers’ markets	x	x
Develop tailored support for pasture-fed livestock farming utilising soil conservation management techniques	x	
Choose local food and support local food growers through procurement policies	x	x
Foster sensitive small-scale growing of vegetables, salad crops and fruit	x	x
Incorporate local food and growing programmes in schools	x	
Focus dedicated support on new entrants to farming	x	
Facilitate and encourage collaborative farming, food processing and marketing enterprises	x	x
Support organic farming and other production methods that conserve soil	x	x
Support advisors providing High Weald specific advice	x	
Support traditional livestock breeds	x	x
Recognise the high cost of maintaining a small-scale landscape with abundant hedges in support schemes	x	
Jointly prepare a best practice code for sustainable land management which fosters activities that enhance the distinctive character of the High Weald and do not damage characteristic habitats and species	x	

Objective FH2

To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Give great weight to medieval field systems in planning decisions especially where there is a high degree of intactness and strong presence or relationship with other notable landscape and heritage features	x	
Require development masterplans to protect and enhance existing field patterns including hedges, ditches or other boundary features, and where possible to restore them when lost, particularly within retained public spaces	x	
Provide specialist advice to support the management of boundary features including hedgerows, coppice, and veteran trees	x	x
Encourage the restoration of derelict hedges, and restoration of lost hedges	x	x
Promote an inventory of Weald hedges	x	x
Support initiatives to generate an economic return from hedge management and hedgerow products	x	x
Protect and manage hedgerows	x	x
Use historic maps to help reinstate lost hedgerows	x	x

Objective FH3

To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Avoid large-scale new tree planting and avoid planting trees on species-rich grassland or heathland and promote natural regeneration for small woodland expansion/creation schemes	x	x
Proactively encourage management and monitoring of local wildlife sites and review the designation of new sites	x	
Identify, designate and appropriately manage species-rich grassland road verges	x	
Deliver workshops aimed at site managers, local landowners and farmers to raise awareness of species-rich neutral grassland habitats and to support best practice management	x	x
Support and facilitate scientific research in collaboration with academic institutes to further knowledge and understanding of species-rich neutral grassland	x	x
Develop a nature recovery network for species-rich grassland, compiling an inventory of core sites, identifying where opportunities exist to restore and enhance degraded species-rich grasslands, and working collaboratively under Weald Meadows Group to co-ordinate conservation action	x	x
Strategies implemented to reduce nutrient input via air pollution to vulnerable habitats such as heathland	x	x
Deliver Countryside Stewardship Facilitation support to cluster groups through targeted advisory visits	x	
Provide support to farmers entering agri-environment schemes and integrate landowner advice on offer from multiple organisations	x	x
Initiate a collaborative campaign to discourage ‘tidy’ edges and manage fields for structural complexity and species diversity	x	x
Prepare landscape management design guides to steer agri-environment support to ensure environmental net gain	x	x
Choose to sow crops in spring rather than autumn		x
Seek opportunities to deliver community-led projects restoring and enhancing species-rich road verges	x	x
Collaboratively develop improved mechanisms for communicating with and supporting owners and managers of Local Wildlife Sites	x	x
Encourage fire safety awareness on heathland	x	x

Objective FH4

To protect the archaeology and historic assets of field and heath.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Require a desk-based assessment for all development affecting fields or field boundaries supported, where appropriate, by field assessment	x	
Promote field archaeology awareness and recognise the importance of historic small quarries, pits and ponds	x	x
Improve Historic Environment Records for fields	x	x
Identify field archaeology and avoid damage to banks and earthworks	x	x





## Natural Beauty

# Land-based economy and related rural life

The High Weald AONB is characterised by an increasing broad-based economy but with a significant land-based sector and related community life focused on mixed farming (particularly family farms and smallholdings), woodland management and rural crafts.

## Key characteristics

- ✓ **Land-based workers** at a proportion higher than the rural average but with an ageing profile.
- ✓ **Strong influence of London** and other employment areas such as Gatwick on the social character and commuting patterns.
- ✓ **Tendency for greater self-sufficiency** in smaller communities to the east of the area away from major population centres.
- ✓ **Retention of woodland workers** and their families who have a multi-generational relationship with, and whose livelihoods rely on, the area's coppice woodlands.
- ✓ **An expensive landscape to manage** due to its small-scale nature and hedged bank and ditch boundaries.
- ✓ **High house prices in relation to wages** leading to increasing tendency for land-based workers to live out of the area.
- ✓ **Strong rural community life** based around small towns and villages supported by a network of valued and accessible local services and amenities, such as village halls, shops and post offices, clubs and societies, and infrastructure including bus services and IT provision.



## Vision

*A landscape in which small-scale farming, forestry and rural crafts continue to play a defining role in the economy of the area and are supplemented by communities managing land for environmental and public benefit, and new land-based enterprises bringing innovation and new technologies (including precision farming and robotics) to support economically viable, and sustainable, land management of the area supporting its conservation. Community life is intimately connected to the land and affordable housing allows for thriving and diverse community life.*



Top five issues

- 1. Low wages and lack of affordable housing and well-designed workspace affecting recruitment and retention of workers and constraining ability of local woodland, craft and agricultural industries to grow.
- 2. Holdings which are typically small (by national standards) struggling to remain economic in the current market under traditional livestock management regimes, and uncertainty over future of agri-environmental schemes.
- 3. High cost of land and decline in affordable farm tenancies a barrier to new entrants to agriculture.
- 4. Loss of traditional skills due to aging workforce and contracting farm and woodland economies, and lack of economic value in land-based products constraining innovation.
- 5. Closures and cuts to rural services and amenities, including bus services, Post Offices, village shops and banks.

Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures

**Agriculture**, forestry and fishing account for 13% of businesses (employing 8% of the workforce) compared with 3% in the South East (employing 1% of the workforce).

**38%** of employment is in micro businesses compared with 17% in the South East.

**29%** of the working age population are retired compared with 21% in the South East.

**Rural** incomes are slightly lower than those in the South East but average house prices are 42% higher.

**Self-sufficient** in cereals, fruit and lamb but an under-supply of potatoes, beef, fresh vegetables and salads.

Evidence and further reading

- Bibby, P. (2007). *Historic Farm Complexes in Current Socio-economic Context*: High Weald. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Defra Rural Statistics Unit (2012). *High Weald AONB: Economic profile*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- *Farming in the High Weald: Current situation and future needs* (2014). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Jones, P. J. et al. (2009). *The potential for the High Weald to supply the food needs of its population under conventional and organic agriculture*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Vorley, B. (2013): *Restocking the Weald: Securing the future of livestock farming in the High Weald’s working landscape*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.

Objective LBE1

To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.

Rationale

To sustain an economically viable land management sector, with a particular emphasis on sustainable and small-scale farming and forestry.

Indicators of Success

- i. Increase in average rural incomes (Defra Rural Statistics Unit: rural income data)

Objective LBE2

To improve amenities, infrastructure (including the provision of appropriate affordable housing), and skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty

Rationale

To foster community life and economic activities – including heritage conservation, sustainable tourism and outdoor education – that support conservation of the AONB.

Indicators of Success

- i. Numbers of people employed in land-based and craft sectors (HWJAC: ONS Census data)

Lord Strang, Chairman of the National Parks Commission in 1959 called on the government to ‘secure modern standards of living in the countryside with improved rural housing and new small rural industries to provide employment’ but observed that these must be ‘fully sympathetic to, and in scale with, the landscape and local style of building’





Objective LBE1

To improve returns from, and thereby increase entry and retention in, farming, forestry, horticulture and other land management activities that conserve and enhance natural beauty.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support and invest in improved working conditions and manufacturing technology for land-based businesses	x	x
Engage positively with mechanisms, such as community land trusts, capable of delivering truly affordable housing and housing tailored to the specific needs of land-based workers	x	x
Seek to retain capacity for land management within farmsteads	x	x
Support investment in small-scale businesses including dedicated small loans, and promote innovation funds and improved rural broadband	x	x
Prioritise retaining affordable farm tenancies in land disposal and seek to deliver additional affordable tenancies for new entrants	x	x
Establish buy-local procurement policies and choose locally-produced food, fencing and furniture	x	x
Promote and celebrate local crafts	x	x
Collate and maintain AONB level data on farming and forestry	x	
Resist removal of agricultural occupancy conditions	x	
Consider working collaboratively with others to offer viable longer term tenancies to young farmers and new entrants	x	x
Innovate and create new land-based enterprise	x	x
Develop and offer career introductions to the land-based sector	x	x

Objective LBE2

To improve amenities, infrastructure (including the provision of appropriate affordable housing), and skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Work collaboratively across sectors to provide comprehensive and relevant AONB tailored training and apprenticeship opportunities	x	x
Seek an in-depth understanding of and creative solutions to rural housing needs	x	x
Seek to support homeworking and co-working particularly related to land-based industries	x	
Support improved digital connectivity across rural areas	x	x
Support the development of training facilities for rural crafts and community land management	x	x
Embed the needs of rural workers within delivery of affordable housing provision	x	x
Work together to plan for appropriate scale and type of development to ensure continuing vitality of local communities and viability of community services	x	x
Seek to retain and support rural services and amenities including bus services, village shops and post offices	x	
Develop and offer career introductions to sectors supporting AONB conservation	x	x

*‘It is above all else to farming... that the landscape of all our potential National Parks [and AONBs] owe the man made element of their character; and it is to the farming communities that we must look for continuance not only of the scenic setting but of the drama itself – the rural life and work, “the mild continuous epic of the soil...” ’*

John Dower, 1945

**John Dower, one of the main architects of the NP&AC Act 1949, trusted rural communities to preserve natural beauty. At the time the majority of High Weald farms were small family farms practising mixed pastoral farming and relying on human labour and ingenuity, rather than mechanisation and chemicals.**





## Natural Beauty

# Other qualities

The High Weald AONB is characterised by perceptual qualities, features and cultural associations that enrich character components, enhance health and wellbeing, and foster enjoyment and appreciation of the beauty of nature.

## Key characteristics

- ✓ **Features and resources providing opportunities for informal outdoor recreation and experiencing the beauty of nature**
  - Intricate and extensive network of footpaths, roads, lanes and disused railway lines enabling walking, running, cycling and riding
  - Climbable sandrock
  - Rivers, reservoirs and the coast used for fishing, birdwatching and water sports
  - Local nature reserves and open spaces owned by public bodies enabling widespread access to wildlife habitats
- ✓ **Locally distinctive and nationally-important features which enrich people's experience of the High Weald**
  - Castles, abbeys, historic parks and gardens
  - Hop gardens and orchards
  - Traditional and locally distinctive buildings including barns, oast houses, Wealden Hall houses, hoppers' huts, wine cellars and parish churches
  - Notable local populations of rare species, and veteran and ancient trees
  - Tangible legacies of the iron and wood industries, e.g. hammer ponds, gravestones and place names
  - Extensive remnant of Medieval forests particularly Ashdown Forest
  - Rural public realm features, including timber and metal fingerpost signs and milestones
  - Locally distinctive products such as food, drink and chestnut fencing

## Other perceived qualities

- Scenic beauty and glimpsed long views
- Unspoilt rural landscape with a sense of naturalness unusual in South East England
- Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of remoteness and tranquillity
- Human-scale landscape with a sense of intimacy

## Cultural associations

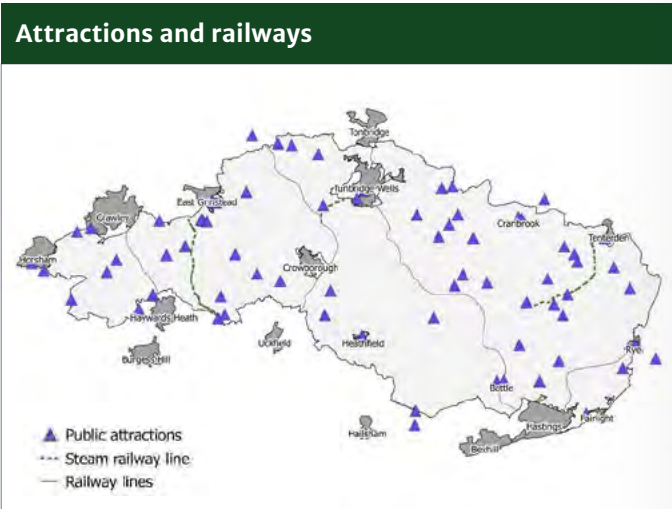
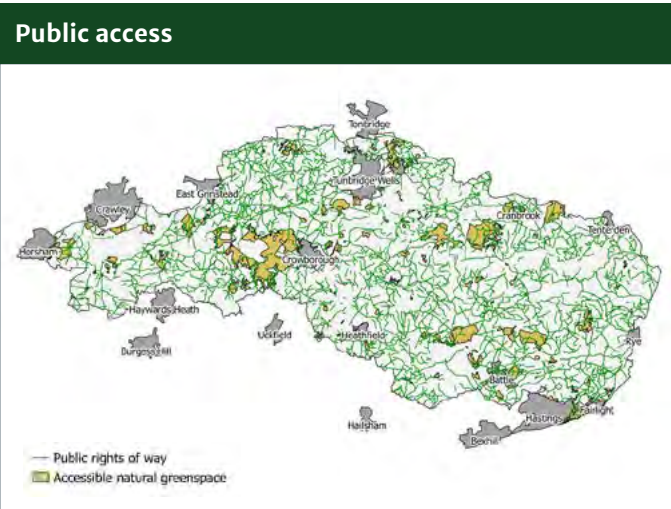
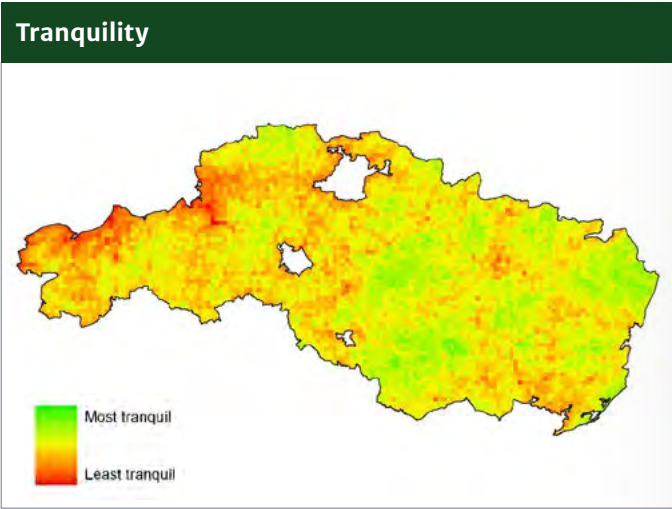
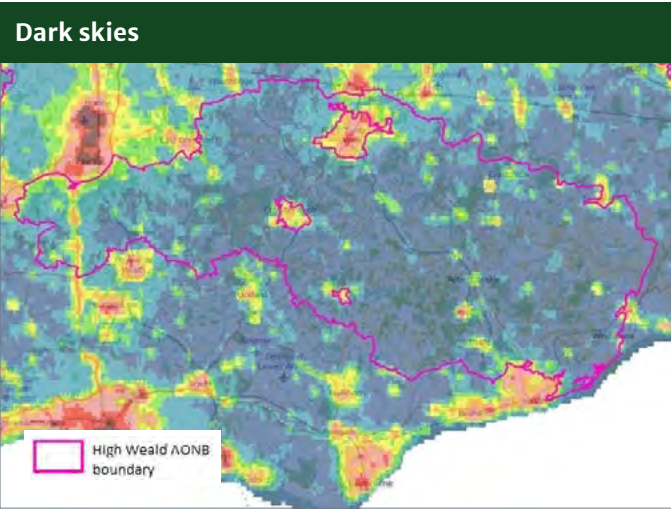
- Writers such as Rudyard Kipling, A.A. Milne, and 'plein air' artists inspired by the 'wilderness' quality of the landscape
- Cultural events such as Sussex bonfire societies, agricultural shows and wood fairs
- Historic events and activities such as the Battle of Hastings and discovery of Iguanodon
- Health-giving properties of altitude and chalybeate springs



## Vision

*An AONB in which people have the means to access the landscape easily and can enjoy outstanding quality multi-sensory experiences and increased contact with nature; all contributing to individual health and wellbeing and an improved sense of community, without damage to characteristic habitats and species. People's emotional engagement with the landscape generates a sense of responsibility and connection to the area leading to more sustainable lifestyles that protect and enhance natural beauty.*





- Top five issues
1. Reducing connection and knowledge of the countryside, including where to go and how to manage it.
  2. Increasing visitor numbers with demand for more infrastructure around popular sites and tension between some countryside user groups.
  3. Reducing accessibility to some user groups due to poor public transport services and declining rights of way maintenance.
  4. Development including traffic, noise and light pollution, degrading the AONB's tranquil and dark qualities.
  5. Lack of awareness of AONB designation and the need for conservation management.

Natural and cultural capital – facts and figures	
1 million people living within 5km of the AONB boundary	88km of mainline railway and 89km of historic railway line
2,126km footpaths, 383km bridleway, 61km byway (density 1.8km per sq.km.)	227km² sites designated for their biodiversity value
83% population within 5km of a ≤100ha natural greenspace site	30 manor houses, castles and gardens open to the public including Battle Abbey (the most visited English Heritage site after Stonehenge)
4 disused railway lines – Cuckoo Trail, Forest Way, Worth Way and Hop-picker's line	2km of climbable sandrock

Objective OQ1

To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald.

Rationale

To help develop emotional connection to the landscape encouraging people to care for the High Weald and support its conservation.

- Indicators of success
- i. Increase in the number and frequency of schools undertaking outdoor learning activities (HWJAC: High Weald Heroes statistics)

Objective OQ2

To increase the contribution of individuals and communities to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

Rationale

To enable the 127,000 residents of the High Weald, and one million people living within 5km of the AONB, to take action to care for the AONB.

- Indicators of Success
- i. Number of volunteer days supporting AONB conservation (HWJAC: compiled from partner data)

*‘The protection of landscape beauty and the encouragement of open-air recreation... will be a great national investment, yielding unlimited returns in health and happiness.’*

Report of the National Parks Committee chaired by Sir Arthur Hobhouse, 1947.



Objective OQ3

To develop and manage access to maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB while conserving its natural beauty.

Rationale

To meet demand for informal recreation from residents and the nearly one million people living within 5km of the AONB, ensuring infrastructure, services and activities are consistent with conserving and enhancing natural beauty and its quiet enjoyment.

- Indicators of Success
- i. Proportion of rights of way in good condition (County councils: rights of way statistics)
  - ii. Increase in High Weald Walking Festival participants (HWJAC: event data)

Objective OQ4

To protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value.

Rationale

To ensure that the special qualities people value, such as tranquillity, dark skies, sense of naturalness and clean air, are recognised and taken account of in AONB management.

- Indicators of Success
- i. No loss of dark skies or tranquillity: HWJAC: CPRE tranquillity data and citizen science sky quality meter readings

Evidence and further reading

- Acorn Tourism (2013). *Tourism in the High Weald AONB*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- High Weald Management Plan 2019 Consultation Workshop Report: *Public Understanding and Enjoyment* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- Land Use Consultants (2013). *The Value of AONB Partnerships*. Land Use Consultants.
- McKernan, P & Grose, M. (2007). *An analysis of accessible natural greenspace provision in the South East*. Forestry Commission & Natural England.
- *Public Understanding and Engagement Questionnaire: Results* (2017). High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.
- van Heijgen, E. (2013). *Human Landscape Perception*. High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.





Objective OQ1

To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Work collaboratively to increase awareness of the AONB story and sense of place	x	x
Produce and disseminate AONB welcome packs for new residents	x	
Encourage children to get close to nature and enjoy the landscape through support the landscape-inspired activities including the primary school education programme, High Weald Heroes	x	x
Promote site-specific land management advice open to all	x	x
Erect AONB signage to promote the High Weald's identity	x	
Promote health walks and other outdoor activities encouraging the wider community into the landscape	x	x
Develop celebratory landscape-inspired outdoor events e.g. Glow Wild, Weald walking festivals, with some targeted at young people and new events such dark sky celebrations	x	x
Produce site-based information and interpretation promoting the High Weald and its special qualities	x	x
Seek new opportunities to celebrate the long history of craft (wool, iron and wood), and the utilisation of geological resources (quarrying, brick-making and glass-making)	x	x
Include information about the AONB on websites	x	x

Objective OQ2

To increase the contribution of individuals and communities to the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Support manage grant schemes that specifically conserve and enhance the AONB	x	x
Widely promote the purpose and objectives of the AONB Management Plan, and the High Weald Charter for Residents and Visitors encouraging care for the countryside and reduction in waste, litter and fly-tipping	x	x
Share AONB data with local neighbourhood planning committees and foster contributions from local communities to the AONB's knowledge base	x	
Jointly produce High Weald guidance on development, land management and responsible access	x	
Collaborate and coordinate communication campaigns (such as tourism marketing and social media) to promote the actions individuals and communities can take to care for the AONB	x	x
Support neighbourhood planning to utilise the AONB Management Plan, data and guidance	x	
Support business-led and community projects that give back to the AONB	x	
Run citizen science projects to gather data on AONB heritage e.g. dark skies	x	x
Recruit new members to sustain and expand volunteer heritage and conservation groups	x	x
Run training events that develop skills in heritage surveys, land management and rural crafts	x	x
Support local, non-governmental organisations (e.g. the High Weald Landscape Trust) that conserve and enhance the AONB	x	x

>90% people find the High Weald's extensive  
footpath network appealing  
High Weald Public Survey, 2018

Objective OQ3

To develop and manage access to maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB while conserving its natural beauty.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Promote local distinctiveness in the visitor 'offer'	x	x
Consider new permitted routes particularly bridleways	x	
Support landowners to maintain rights of way, particularly promoted routes	x	
Jointly produce an access strategy that sets out areas for strategic investment to improve rights of way and increase access for all users	x	
Support infrastructure and services including new off-road cycling and riding routes that improve access and links with visitor attractions from surrounding urban areas	x	
Set up and manage grant schemes that support improved access to the AONB	x	x
Support landscape-inspired health and wellbeing initiatives	x	x
Encourage responsible access, particularly dog walking	x	x
Encourage engagement of people from all backgrounds and address inequalities of access particularly for people from different ethnic groups, low income households, children and young people and people with disabilities	x	x
Engage with mental health services and environmental therapies	x	x
Develop green infrastructure links between the High Weald and surrounding towns and villages	x	x
Develop high quality (easy to follow, interpreted) self-guided trails including easy access routes	x	x
Produce visitor management plans for sensitive sites and areas	x	x
Run visitor events focused on celebrating the area's sense of place including maintaining and developing the High Weald Walking Festival	x	x
Run networking events and training events to share best practice in visitor management	x	

Objective OQ4

To protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value.

Proposed Actions	Public bodies	Others
Maintain an understanding of the perceptual landscape qualities people value and consider these in policy documents and decisions	x	
Recognise and act to minimise the impact of traffic noise and congestion on rural lanes	x	x
Consider reduction in speed limits on rural roads	x	
Follow the Institute for Lighting Professionals guidance; promote information on dark sky-friendly lighting; install outside lighting only when needed and use dark sky-friendly lighting	x	x
Act to remove and reduce inappropriate noise intrusion, supporting further study into the impacts of noise, such as aircraft noise and traffic, on quiet enjoyment	x	
Identify and protect valued views and act to reduce scenic impact of intrusive developments	x	x
Promote fair access to the landscape for health and wellbeing	x	x
Promote the rich cultural, artistic and historical associations with the landscape	x	x
Consider preparing local statements about perceptual landscape qualities valued by the community as part of local landscape assessments	x	







97% people enjoy  
the High Weald  
countryside

High Weald Public Survey, 2018

# High Weald Charter for residents and visitors

The following are actions that all residents, visitors and businesses can take to help care for this nationally-important landscape.

✔ **Buy local products and services from farmers and woodland managers who actively manage their land to benefit the environment**

The landscape and wildlife value of the area's woodlands, hedges, meadows, heathlands and field margins are dependent on traditional management. Money invested in products and services that help support this management is money invested in conserving the AONB and its local economy.

✔ **Manage your land for wildlife and maintain the rural nature of your property**

Fields, woodland, paddocks and gardens support valuable and threatened wildlife. Inappropriate materials and features, often associated with urban areas, are leading to the gradual loss of the AONB's valued rural feel.

✔ **Help prevent the spread of invasive and harmful plant and animal species**

Introduced plant, animal and fish species spread rapidly in the High Weald countryside, competing with our native wildlife and leading to its loss.

✔ **Use less water**

Demands for water lead to high levels of water extraction, damaging the wildlife of the AONB's streams, rivers and wet grasslands. Increased demand in future will create pressure for new reservoirs within the AONB.

✔ **Reduce, reuse and recycle, and dispose of all litter responsibly**

Litter spoils enjoyment of the countryside for the majority of residents. Less rubbish means less pressure for landfill sites and incinerators in the AONB.

✔ **Respect other users – follow the Countryside Code**

Through responsible behaviour we can all use and enjoy the countryside without damaging the enjoyment or livelihoods of others.

✔ **Slow down for people, horses and wildlife**

Traffic spoils enjoyment of the High Weald for 80 per cent of its residents. Speeding cars kill people, horses, badgers, deer and foxes, and ancient routeways and their rare plants are damaged by inconsiderate driving and parking.

✔ **Avoid using the car where possible and consider using renewable energy in your home**

Emissions from petrol and other non-renewable fossil fuels contribute to climate change and lead to degradation of valuable habitats such as sandrock and gradual loss of wildlife such as bluebells.

✔ **Take pride in the High Weald – promote its special features and places to family, friends and visitors**

Promoting what you find special about the High Weald is the best way of encouraging commitment and action by others to the area.

✔ **Have a say**

Your views can influence care of the area – use consultation processes operating at parish, district, county and AONB level to steer policy and action that affects the area.

✔ **Get involved – support local conservation organisations**

With your financial and practical support, local conservation organisations can take action to care for the area such as monitoring threatened wildlife, undertaking practical conservation tasks and lobbying government.







*I thought it would last my time–  
The sense that, beyond the town,  
There would always be fields and farms,...  
  
It seems, just now,  
To be happening so very fast;  
Despite all the land left free  
For the first time I feel somehow  
That it isn’t going to last...*

Extracts from ‘Going Going’ by Philip Larkin, 1972

Definition of terms used in the context of this Plan

- **Aesthetic** – Concerned with beauty, or the appreciation of beauty
- **Assart** – Land enclosed from woodland often still with numerous trees on boundaries
- **Character** – A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements (or components) that makes an area different from other areas
- **Conservation** – The preservation, protection or restoration of the landscape
- **Culture** – The sum total of people's beliefs, customs, social groupings, knowledge and technology, not inherited through biology
- **Dark skies** – Where you can see starry skies and our own galaxy, the Milky Way
- **Field** – An area of land, often enclosed, traditionally used for cultivation or the grazing of livestock
- **Field system** – A group or complex of fields sharing a common character which appear to form a coherent whole (in the High Weald this usually results from the influence of topography and land use but also historic tenure)
- **Gill** – A deep cleft or ravine, usually wooded and forming the course of a stream
- **Historic Landscape Characterisation** – Method of identification and interpretation of the varying historic character within an area looking beyond individual heritage assets to an understanding of the whole landscape
- **Key characteristics** – Combinations of elements particularly important to character that help make that character distinctive
- **Landscape** – An area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.
- **Natural beauty** – Defined by the Statement of Significance
- **Natural assets** – Biological assets, land and water areas with their ecosystems, subsoil assets and air
- **Regenerative agriculture** – A system of farming principles and practices that increases biodiversity above and below the soils’ surface, restores soil health and rebuilds soil organic matter, improves watersheds, and enhances ecosystem services
- **Routeway** – Any route between places across either land or water
- **Setting** – The surroundings in which the AONB is experienced by people

- **Shaw** – A narrow strip of woodland
- **Significance** – What is special and valued about the AONB to this and future generations
- **Species-rich grassland** – A grassland displaying a wide variety of wild flowers and grasses with the exact composition varying according to the dynamic interaction of factors such as management, drainage, history and soils
- **Sustainable land management** – Farming and other land management activity that conserves the character of the AONB, enhances the diversity and biomass of characteristic wildlife, improves soil quality and the functioning of natural systems; and supports local livelihoods and social structure
- **Wood pasture** – The product of historic land management resulting in a typical vegetation structure of large, open-grown or high forest trees (often pollards) at various densities in a matrix of grazed grassland, heathland or woodland

Glossary of terms

<b>HLC</b>	Historic Landscape Characterisation
<b>JAC/HWJAC</b>	High Weald Joint Advisory Committee
<b>NAAONB</b>	National Association for AONBs
<b>NP&amp;AC Act</b>	National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
<b>RIGs</b>	Regionally Interesting Geological Sites
<b>SAC</b>	Special Areas of Conservation
<b>SSSI</b>	Site of Special Scientific Interest

Disclaimer

Adoption of this Management Plan by partner authorities does not necessarily imply endorsement of the views and conclusions of documents identified in this Plan as ‘Evidence and further reading’.











Published by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee on behalf of:



[www.highweald.org](http://www.highweald.org)